

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET:  
THE USE OF PHYSICAL OBJECTS IN PREACHING

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To my wonderful wife, Laura Lee,  
whose unwavering support gives me strength  
and whose gentle heart helps me see the world with fresh eyes.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Most preachers have a strong desire for their sermons to have a deep and lasting impact on their congregations. While much of the world has become far more visually oriented in its perception of reality, and a greater appreciation has arisen of the different God-given learning styles of people, preaching has by-and-large remained a hearing-only activity. This thesis-project demonstrates that the relatively simple practice of using physical objects as part of the sermon greatly increases the power of preaching to transform lives. The Scriptures often depict God the Father, Jesus the Son and many of their followers making use of visual elements in order to communicate truth more effectively. This approach is further supported by studies which demonstrate how teaching is elevated when the sense of sight is included. The benefits are many, especially in the areas of attention, comprehension and retention. However, in order to maximize the power of physical objects in sermons, careful thought must be given to how best to choose and use those objects. This thesis provides a number of guidelines to help navigate those decisions, in order to help preachers adopt an approach to sermons which is highly effective in communicating God's Word to today's audience.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM**

Preaching is all about making a difference. Each time a preacher delivers a message, the purpose is always the same: to bring together the Word of the Almighty God and the focus of the congregation so that transformation can take place in their lives. What could be more significant? That is the goal. However, in reality, such meaningful dreams far too often go unfulfilled, as time after time people file out the church doors after a service feeling confused or uninspired or untouched or even struggling already to remember what it was that was said during the message despite all the good intentions.

What then can preachers do so that their sermons can make a lasting impact? Any seminary library will demonstrate that there is no shortage of books on homiletics which offer answers to that question. The recommended suggestions are often contradictory, at times either simplistic or intricately complex. Clearly there is no easy answer. Rather, it would appear that it is through a combination of good practices, customized to the preacher's context, which will result in preaching that consistently makes a difference.

This thesis-project will focus on one of those good practices, the use of objects as part of the message. It is not offered as a "magic pill" that can cure all homiletic woes, but as an opportunity to understand better one very strategic aspect of preaching. While this thesis is limited in the breadth of its scope, that in no way implies that its subject is unimportant. On the contrary, this thesis will strive to demonstrate how much of a difference this simple practice can make in delivering a message.

This generation of preachers, like all those which have gone before, is concerned about reaching the people of its day. While opinions vary, one feature of the modern day that seems very clear is the sense that today's world is heavily influenced by the bombardment of messages through various forms of media. This is not only true of the developed world, but increasingly so in the developing world, too. Richard A. Jensen observes, "Today's churchgoers, steeped in multimedia communications, have been trained to think and learn with their eyes and ears together."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say, "We really don't need experts to tell us that we live in a visual age. The evidence is overwhelming, and it ought to have an impact on our preaching. The people in our congregations have been shaped powerfully and not always helpfully by a seemingly endless source of visual images."<sup>2</sup> How does one preach in a way that connects with a room full of people whose lives are filled with CNN sound bites, MTV videos, flashy web pages and movies whose images blur the lines between reality and fiction?

Running parallel to this issue is another which arises from very different quarters. Studies in the area of learning have produced results which have direct impact on preaching. Given the fact that the majority of sermons are strictly an auditory activity, there should be great concern that, according to A. Duane Litfin, "studies have shown that three days after being exposed to a particular message, the average learner will remember 10 percent if he only heard it, 20 percent if he only saw it, but 65 percent if he both heard and saw the message."<sup>3</sup> Although the percentages vary according to different reports, the principle remains true. A Sunday sermon which is only verbal will be mostly

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<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Jensen, *Envisioning the Word: The Use of Visual Images in Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Jensen, *Envisioning*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> A. Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 215.



forgotten by Wednesday. Such a revelation can be very discouraging for preachers who have laboured long to communicate God's eternal truths to their flocks.

Based on the cultural trends of today as well as the reports about how we best learn as human beings, this thesis will examine the use of physical objects in sermons in order to discover the advantages and potential pitfalls of their use. Its aim is to help the readers understand how preaching with objects can have a greater influence on their listeners. The same statistics which can cause discouragement among preachers also offer a window of hope that can transform sermons into instruments of lasting impact. If people retain 65 percent of a message they both see and hear, for the preacher the solution is obvious. As Haddon Robinson puts it, "You must appeal to their senses...directly through both sight and sound."<sup>4</sup> Rick Blackwood agrees: "Instead of engaging only the ears of your congregation, multisensory communication enables you to engage their ears, eyes, and hands, and it brings more of the whole person into the learning process."<sup>5</sup> What is not so obvious is what precisely is meant by a multisensory sermon.

There are numerous options available. One solution, put forward by Robinson, is simply to ensure good facial expressions and gestures are made visible while the spoken word is heard.<sup>6</sup> Many, however, do not consider that sufficient. Some people believe a

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<sup>4</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 193.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 13. Note: When Blackwood speaks of multisensory sermons, he includes elements specifically designed to help the interactive learners. This thesis chose to keep its focus narrow, concentrating exclusively on physical objects. This lends itself primarily to the visual learner. However, in Blackwood's book, the interactive learning that he uses is not extreme, with people getting up and doing activities in various parts of the room during the sermon. The approach used is more subtle. Therefore, the differentiation between the visual and interactive is small. It would seem that the biggest step in this process is moving a preacher from verbal only to verbal and visual. If people can be persuaded and equipped to make this change, any further steps would be relatively easy.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, *Preaching*, 193.

sermon is transformed into a multisensory message by being more contemporary, choosing the path of technology which makes use of movie clips, PowerPoint, etc.<sup>7</sup> Others are suggesting we look back into Church history.<sup>8</sup> According to this group, we need to return to our roots when artistic expressions of our faith dominated our worship spaces and worship services. Without dismissing any of these ideas, which all hold merit, it appears that there is one proposal that is usually overlooked in homiletical books and articles, yet is still very basic, and that is the use of physical objects as part of the sermon. Blackwood says it plainly: “Using object lessons is one of the easiest and most effective methods of going visual and interactive.”<sup>9</sup>

Through the thoughtful use of physical objects in a sermon, learning can improve in a number of ways. By using objects, we acknowledge that there is not a “one size fits all” path to learning. People simply do not all learn in the same way. This is how Blackwood explains it: “...the multisensory teacher understands that people have *learning preferences* by which they *prefer* to learn and by which they learn *best*. Stated another way: Some people in our congregation prefer to learn by *hearing*; others need to *see* the concept in order to learn it; still many others learn best by *interacting* with the teacher.”<sup>10</sup> Merely by choosing to include visuals as part of a sermon, the preacher reaches out to connect with those in the congregation who prefer to learn or who learn best when their eyes are an active part of the process.

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<sup>7</sup> See Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 163. Also Stephen Brown, “Illustrating the Sermon,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 202.

<sup>8</sup> See Jaime Lara, “Visual Preaching: The Witness of Our Latin Eyes,” *Chicago Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 268. Also Richard A. Jensen, “Thinking in Picture,” *Dialog*, 43, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 298.

<sup>9</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 15.

At the same time, regardless of a person's learning style, studies show that everyone stays more focused, understands better, and remembers longer when the teaching method includes more than just the sense of hearing. A study from the University of Minnesota concludes, "Presentations using visual aids were found to be 43% *more persuasive* than unaided presentations."<sup>11</sup> These are just some of the results which show the teaching power that visuals add to a verbal message. If preachers are serious about crafting sermons which make a significant, long-lasting impact on people's lives, information such as this cannot be ignored.

The other reason why preaching with physical objects needs to be seriously considered is the testimony of Scripture. It has been noted that the various genres of biblical literature intersect very clearly with what has been discovered in recent years regarding learning styles. Patricia Wilson-Kastner, for example, contrasts narrative writing with the imagery found in the Bible, saying, "Narrative is a primary focus for the more temporally conscious mind, imagery a focus for the spatially and visually directed."<sup>12</sup> Breaking the genres down even further, David Schlafer differentiates between poetry, narrative and expository argument, convinced that it is no accident that all three are found in God's Word. He explains, "These genres are natural expressions of the different...ways in which human beings 'make sense' of their experiences....Poetry is centered in image language. Narratives are centered in story language. Expository prose and persuasive oratory are centered in idea, or argument language."<sup>13</sup> It's interesting that

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<sup>11</sup> D.R. Vogel, O.W. Dickson, and J.A. Lehman, "Persuasion and the Role of Visual Presentation Support: The UM/3M Study," University of Minnesota, 3, accessed June 16, 2012, <http://misrc.umn.edu/workingpapers/fullpapers/1986/8611.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 19-21.

<sup>13</sup> David Schlafer, *Preaching as Image, Story and Idea: Sermons That Work VII* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1988), 46-48.

the apostle John, as he opens his first letter, highlights what are today understood as the three learning preferences: “That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked* upon and have *touched* with our hands, concerning the word of life...” (1 John 1:1, ESV, emphasis added).

The use of visuals is not simply flirting on the periphery of the Bible, but is rather firmly settled at the heart of its message. Rob Bell goes so far as to say, “God is the God of props... I use a lot of props and visuals. People are like, ‘You use your props and stuff. I’m just into *biblical* preaching.’ Well, find me a person in the Scriptures who doesn’t use visuals.”<sup>14</sup> When the Bible is read with an openness toward this concept, the visuals leap out. For example the sacrificial system found in the Law was brimming over with messages aimed at the eyes. From Bell’s perspective, “That’s how God explains atonement, substitutionary sacrifice, reconciliation. These are abstract...God takes these concepts and puts them in dirt and blood and flesh and bones and wood and steel.”<sup>15</sup> The construction of the tabernacle and the clothing of the priests were visuals that the people of Israel saw every day, helping them picture some great truths found in the Law.

Objects also were used to help God’s people remember important events. In Joshua 4, as the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land, God not only commanded the people to remember how he helped them cross the Jordan River. He also provided a powerful visual. Each tribe brought a large rock from the middle of the river and they were all placed together as a monument that would remind them in the future of what God had done, and would serve as an object lesson for future generations (Josh 4:4-8). Other keen users of visuals were the Old Testament prophets. Certainly they did plenty

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<sup>14</sup> “The Subversive Art: Leadership Interview with Rob Bell,” *Leadership* 25, no 2 (Spring 2004): 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> “Interview with Rob Bell,” 29.

of talking and pronouncing, but that wasn't enough. God wanted his spokesmen to *show* what they meant. There are many examples that could be cited. In Jeremiah 27 and 28, the prophet made and wore a large yoke on his neck to demonstrate dramatically the fact that the people of Judah and the surrounding nations needed to submit to Babylon's rule if they wanted to survive. A number of years earlier, Isaiah had grabbed the people's attention through a visual that must have made a lasting impression. He went without clothes or sandals for a period of three years to depict how the countries of Egypt and Cush would be defeated by the Assyrians (Isa 20:2-4). As will be seen in chapter two, the Old Testament contains many examples of visual objects which were used to capture people's attention, to teach them an abstract truth, or to help them remember something important.

In turning to the New Testament, we are given the opportunity to observe the way in which Jesus, the Master Teacher, taught his followers. Again, there are numerous examples of how Jesus, at times, chose to use visuals to communicate with his listeners who, incidentally, were not primarily children but rather adults. For instance, when some of his enemies tried to trap him into saying something against the Roman tax system, Jesus asked for a coin, calling out, "'Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.' They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'" (Mark 12:15-16)<sup>16</sup> Jesus could have said, "You know how on the coin there is..." Instead he wanted them to see it with their eyes. It's easy to imagine how at that moment, as Jesus held up the coin, every eye was fastened on the small metal disk. But he didn't limit his use of visuals for teaching those who were against him. He also employed them

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<sup>16</sup> All Bible quotations will be from the New International Version (2011) unless otherwise noted.

when instructing his closest companions. In Matt 18:1-6, the disciples pressed him to find out who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven—no doubt hoping he would point at them. But instead of simply telling them the radical message that they had to become like small children, he actually called a nearby child to come over. Verse 2 says, “He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.” He didn’t even just point at the child from a distance. He wanted the visual to be front and center. There were other times when Jesus said “*Look* at the birds of the air” and “*See* how the lilies of the field grow” (Matt 6:26, 28). Jesus knew the power of the visual.

Both the principles of learning as well as the pattern found in Scripture indicate that it is important for preachers to understand what can be gained through the use of physical objects as well as the opportunities that can potentially be lost if they are ignored. Admittedly there are some who, for various reasons, oppose the use of visuals or props in a sermon. For the majority of preachers, however, it is not so much an issue of conviction as much as it is convenience. Litfin sums it up when he says, “Why bother to use visual aids? Such a question is usually the product of apathy rather than antipathy. Many speakers simply do not feel the need to make their ideas visual.”<sup>17</sup> How important is it for preachers to “feel the need to make their ideas visual?” This thesis will show, among other things, that sermon ideas which include physical objects are significantly more likely to be noticed, understood and remembered by the listener. In other words, the sermon will have a greater impact.

To that end, chapter two of this thesis will examine in depth a number of Scripture passages which pertain to this subject. Some will be considered as examples of how God

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<sup>17</sup> Litfin, *Public Speaking*, 212.

chose to communicate to men and women during the time of the Old and New Testaments in ways which included or emphasized visual objects. Other verses will be studied from a theological perspective to see how they intersect with what we know of the learning process.

Chapter three will investigate sources pertaining to subjects such as homiletics, education, public speaking and children's ministry with regard to objects. By considering findings from various fields, it is hoped that principles may be found which will apply to the use of objects in a sermon. Attention will also be given to various studies which have been done in the area of communication and learning.

In chapter four, a project will be outlined which will make use of the conclusions of this thesis. The plan is for the project to take place in Rwanda, Africa. An invitation to a Preachers' Seminar will go out to English-speaking men and women from many different countries who are involved with or interested in preaching (e.g. Canada, Rwanda, America, Denmark, etc.). During a three-hour presentation, the main principles about preaching with physical objects which have arisen from this thesis will be shared. The seminar will also include time at the end for participants to complete an evaluation form in order to provide feedback.

The thesis will conclude with the fifth chapter which will report on how the project went. An analysis will be made of the evaluations which were completed by those who attended. Reflections will also be shared regarding what was learned through the process of teaching the material, especially in a multicultural context.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is little disagreement over whether or not a change has taken place in the communication patterns of the world. William A. Dyrness states it this way: “There is surely a fundamental agreement on all sides that we have entered a visual era.”<sup>1</sup> The disagreement arises over what the Church’s response should be to this cultural shift from the aural to the visual. In addition, there has been a growing emphasis in society on the increased effectiveness of teaching that uses more than just the sense of hearing to communicate. How is the Church to react to this development? Does this mean that not only Christian education but also preaching should adjust to accommodate this information?

The elevation of the status of the visual has led to reactions that have ranged from shrugs of apathy to entire books being written in response. However, for believers, decisions should not be dictated simply by strong feelings and opinions, or even by tradition, but rather by a careful study of the Bible. Are there scriptural commands or principles that provide divine guidance in this area? Are there people or ministries in the pages of the Old and New Testaments who can serve as examples, giving today’s believers direction to the question of the use of visuals in preaching? In order to gain a clear biblical and theological perspective, an examination will be made of the role that the visual plays, first in God’s self-revelation to humankind, second in the Old Testament, and finally in the New Testament.

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<sup>1</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 132.



## A. THE ROLE OF THE VISUAL IN GOD’S SELF-REVELATION

A biblical/theological understanding must begin with clarity on how God chose to reveal himself to humankind. Was there a visual element to that revelation? If so, was it a central aspect of the process or more on the periphery? Did God give any commands to people about how he was to be perceived and understood? Unsurprisingly, there is not total agreement on this subject. Some theologians consider “images” as the enemy of God’s people.<sup>2</sup> Others see them as absolutely necessary for a complete and accurate understanding of God.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Word-based Revelation versus Idolatry

It is clear from Scripture that the Lord is a communicating God. The infinite, immortal, transcendent God has chosen to make himself known to the people he has created. How has he done this? Was it possible through images? Not according to Simon Vibert, who states, “To bring Omniscient God—He who is all-knowing, all-seeing, all-wise into the realm of the seen and controllable indeed is futile.”<sup>4</sup> Arthur W. Hunt agrees, saying, “God purposefully chose the medium of writing to make Himself known. Only the written word is sufficient for communicating all the theological complexities of an abstract divinity.”<sup>5</sup> In the view of some, since God is so far above

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<sup>2</sup> See Arthur W. Hunt, *The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 29. Also Simon Vibert, “The Word In An Audio-Visual Age: Can We Still Preach The Gospel?” *Churchman* 106, no 2 (1992): 149.

<sup>3</sup> See Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 75-76. Also Donald P. Regier, “Audiovisual Support for Your Teaching,” in *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Teaching*, eds. Kenneth O. Gangel and Howard G. Hendricks (n.p.: Victor, 1988), 197-198.

<sup>4</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 150.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 66.

human understanding or experience, any method other than writing would prove insufficient in communicating all that needs to be known about God. In the words of Hunt, it “goes beyond orality, pictorial representation, dance, or smoke signals.”<sup>6</sup> As demonstrated in Katherine Savage’s book, *The Story of World Religions*, even a cursory survey of the various religious efforts of people down through history reveals a wide variety of methods used in seeking to understand the divine.<sup>7</sup> However, as Vibert explains, “God is to be known only through the means He has created...[and] made available: the Word is the way He has revealed Himself. The Word is the way He is to be found. Though God is present in every part of creation, He can only be approached through the means He has made.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the way in which God is to be approached and known is not a decision which lies in the hands of created beings, but rather in the hands of the Creator himself.

Another issue is the critical importance of the truth that is being communicated by God. The salvation of humankind hangs in the balance. Therefore, Hunt points once again to the written word. “Writing is God’s preferred medium because it possesses the objectivity and permanency needed to convey and preserve the old, old story.”<sup>9</sup> An approximate understanding is not enough. It must be crystal clear and always remain so.

It is for these reasons some theologians are convinced that “it was not a mistake that [God] purposefully chose the medium of writing to make Himself known....The

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<sup>6</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Savage, *The Story of World Religions* (New York: Henry Z. Walck, 1967), 273.

<sup>8</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 148-149.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur W. Hunt, “The New Dark Ages,” *Christian Research Journal* 24, no. 1 (2001), under “The New Dark Ages-Darkness Descending,” accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-new-dark-ages/#christian-books-4>.

message delivered to Moses was *written* with the finger of God.”<sup>10</sup> This, of course, is referring to Moses’ experience on Mount Sinai when the Lord delivered to him the Law.

Moses recalled his experience in Deut 10:4-5:

The LORD wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the Ten Commandments he had proclaimed to you on the mountain, out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me. Then I came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the LORD commanded me, and they are there now.

Even as he gave these divine words to the children of Israel, God was aware of the human inclination to be drawn toward divine images. In the second commandment, God made it abundantly clear to the Israelites what he thought about idol worship. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exod 20:4-5a). Theologians such as Vibert have seen in this command an open declaration of war by God against images as a whole. He says, “Sincere desire to construct images and icons incited idolatry rather than true worship of God.”<sup>11</sup> Hunt puts it this way: “*There exists a long-standing and irreconcilable tension between the word and the image.* One of the major themes running through the Old Testament is Israel’s long struggle with idolatry.”<sup>12</sup> In the Old Testament, virtually every time the nation of Israel found itself in trouble, the pages of Scripture describe its involvement in idol worship. On the other hand, when they chose faithfully to follow Yahweh, resisting the idols of surrounding nations, they were blessed as a people. This radical departure from the normal religious practices has led to the following reflection by Theodore Roszak:

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<sup>10</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 148-149.

<sup>12</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 41.

We can only wonder by what secret and ruthless process Judaism purged itself of the primeval power of the eye and hand to give witness to the divine. But so it was. And in return for this rough amputation of visual and tactile witness, the Jews acquired their incomparable ear. Their witness became exclusively, prodigiously auditory: they heard...they heard as no one else had ever heard. They became history's most alert listeners. Their God was pre-eminently a voice, one who revealed his magisterial presence by speaking into the world from beyond it.<sup>13</sup>

By focusing their entire culture upon the holy Scriptures—memorizing, writing and reading it—they became what some have described as “the *first* people to achieve a high level of social literacy.”<sup>14</sup> During the Babylonian exile of the Jews from the Southern Kingdom, the system of using synagogues was established so that the Torah and other Old Testament books could be regularly studied. As Hunt says, “A universal and national education, then, was a way to safeguard the onslaughts of paganism.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, from the first moments when Israel was established as a nation, the written word was central to its identity, to its vitality. Even the way in which the tabernacle was set up communicated this core tenet of their faith. At God's command, “underneath the mercy seat was kept the ‘ten words’ [the *Decalogue*] which the prophet was to take out to the people.”<sup>16</sup>

This continued into the New Testament era with the coming of Christ, who the apostle John described vividly as the *Word* “because He is the perfect declaration of God (John 1:18).”<sup>17</sup> In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 14 & 18 read: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us....No one has seen God at any time; the only

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<sup>13</sup> Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 112, quoted in R.T. Brooks, “Preaching in an Audio-Visual Age,” *Baptist Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1981): 122.

<sup>14</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 148.

<sup>17</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), location 997, Kindle e-book.

begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” Vibert paraphrases these words in the following way, emphasizing the centrality of the verbal in God’s self-revelation: “‘The Word made flesh’, who (literally) tabernacled among us [has] ‘exegeted’ the Father’s Glory.”<sup>18</sup> It is this word-based foundation which, according to Hunt, brings Christianity into tension with pagan religions which are image-based or image-dependent.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, during Old Testament times, God gave commands to his people to abstain from all forms of idolatry. At the same time he elevated the written word as he revealed himself to the nation of Israel through the Ten Commandments. The same can be said of God’s ultimate self-revelation, the incarnate Christ. The message was obvious when the first name that John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, assigned to Jesus was the *Word*. Vibert summarizes it in this way: “Divine communication is Word-centred.”<sup>20</sup>

If this is the case, what implications are there for today’s preaching? If Christianity is indeed a word-based faith, are there attitudes or approaches that are non-negotiable? John Stott answers that question in this way: “According to the Bible, the living God himself is a speaking God. He has communicated with us by speech, and he means us to communicate with one another in the same way. To decline to do so would immeasurably impoverish us, and diminish our dignity to that of birds and beasts.”<sup>21</sup>

However, this raises some important questions. If believers are to communicate (i.e. preach) using speech, does that mean all other forms are not only a poor choice, but

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<sup>18</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 148.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt, “New Dark Ages,” under “The New Dark Ages—Darkness Descending.”

<sup>20</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 148.

<sup>21</sup> John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 68.

actually a *sinful* choice? If there are visual elements within a sermon, would that be considered participation in idolatry? Is this an either/or situation, having to choose between the verbal and the visual? Or is it possible to recognize the primacy of the word, while at the same time use the visual to strengthen the preaching experience? Is it accurate to interpret God's self-revelation as mono-sensory or does the Bible actually depict God's self-revelation as multisensory?

## 2. Multisensory Revelation

While it is clear that the spoken and written word plays a unique and powerful role in the revelation of God, the position which seeks to dismiss all images as pagan and contrary to God's plan of revelation seems to be ignoring significant portions of Scripture in order to hold to its own viewpoint. This can be seen in all levels of God's revelation: general revelation, the special revelation of Scripture and the special revelation of the Incarnation.

Donald Regier states, "We can know God because He has made Himself known. He has communicated with His creation. Much of this communication has been sensory and without words."<sup>22</sup> This is what theologians refer to as general revelation. It is the way in which God has revealed himself to everyone "generally," usually through creation. One of the important passages that teaches this doctrine is Psalm 19. Verses 1 and 2 state: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hand. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." God has chosen to reveal himself to the world through the heavens above. But then verse

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<sup>22</sup> Regier, "Audiovisual Support," 197-198.

3 makes this interesting addition: “They have no speech, there are no words; no sound is heard from them” (NIV alternate translation). In other words, this testimony about God happens without the use of the sense of hearing. It is a visual revelation of the divine.

Some might be tempted to dismiss this form of revelation as inconsequential or unclear, a second-class citizen in the ranks of God’s communication of himself to people. However, Regier responds to such thinking in this way: “This is one of God’s great communications to man; so compelling, in fact, that men who have rejected this evidence of God’s eternal power and divine nature are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).”<sup>23</sup> While it is generally accepted that this form of revelation cannot lead one to a saving knowledge of the Lord, it does not therefore mean that general revelation is unimportant. There is much about God which can be learned through what is experienced by the senses in nature, even to the extent that refusal to accept what has been revealed in this way is enough to warrant condemnation by God.

It is also interesting that humans, who are depicted as the pinnacle of creation, are specifically made in the *image* of God (Gen 1:26-27). This image-bearing was true, not only before sin entered the human experience, but after it as well. Following the Flood, God declared, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (Gen 9:6). It is true that the Bible does not take the time to explain precisely what being made in the image of God means. However, it seems to be implying that, in some mysterious way, what is seen in a fellow human being gives one a glimpse of the Creator who made that person.

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<sup>23</sup> Regier, “Audiovisual Support,” 198.

What about other forms of revelation? Did God employ visual elements when it came to special revelation? Blackwood answers, “God also teaches us in a multisensory form when it comes to *special revelation*, that is, the Bible.”<sup>24</sup> The Bible is the written word of God, inspired by the work of the Holy Spirit. However, within those pages are found images and visuals which were used by the God who both warns of the danger of idols, yet also knows the way in which visuals connect with the human mind and soul. This is described by R. T. Brooks in this way: “Naturally [the Bible] will not tolerate the idol which claims to *be* God, but a book which can speak of God in terms of light, fire, rock, wind, sky and a hundred other sense-dominated images was never that of a people closed to the transcendent significance of that which is seen and felt.”<sup>25</sup> A good example of this is the story referred to earlier when God wrote the Ten Commandments on Moses’ stone tablets. What was the context of this emphasis on the written word? In Exodus 19:17-19 it says,

Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Even as his people were receiving the Torah, God was impressing on their minds through a powerful, multisensory display that he was the holy, all-powerful, utterly pure, sovereign God over all. While he was forbidding idolatry with the second commandment, he was employing images which were burned into the hearts of his followers. To dismiss either part of this revelation—the written or the non-written—is to misunderstand the fullness of God’s revelation. Neil Olcott understands the balance

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<sup>24</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> R. T. Brooks, “Preaching in an Audio-Visual Age,” *Baptist Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1981): 124.



which is needed, saying, “The visual was highlighted and applauded in the Old Testament...but with the prohibition against allowing such things to become idols.”<sup>26</sup>

No doubt there are some who find it disconcerting that God would both forbid the worship of images while at the same time utilize images in a highly dramatic fashion—even within the same event! In seeking to understand this apparent paradox, perhaps the recent appreciation of the different learning styles with which people are created can shed some light on the way the Scriptures were written. As was mentioned in chapter one, Wilson-Kastner suggests that God’s use of both the written and the visual when he revealed himself lines up perfectly with the different ways that people learn. She says, “Narrative is a primary focus for the more temporally conscious mind, imagery a focus for the spatially and visually directed.”<sup>27</sup> Instead of resisting the idea of different learning styles, it appears that there is good biblical support for recognizing and utilizing them.

In examining how God reached out to the human race and revealed himself through the inspired pages of the Bible, it appears extreme to consider all use of visual elements to be on the same level as idolatry. Olcott summarizes this well when he says, “To throw out all images and all visual stimuli would indisputably be to throw out the baby with the bath water. All one must do is look at the Scriptures to see how often and how powerfully image has been used to help communicate God’s message to mankind.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, when God revealed himself in Scripture, he used a multisensory approach.

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<sup>26</sup> Neil D. Olcott, “The Use of Multimedia to Help Preach Christ” (DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1997), 25.

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> Olcott, “Use of Multimedia,” 25.

However, the ultimate act of God's self-revelation to humankind took place when God himself became a man. Once again, the scriptural record reveals how God used what must be described as a multisensory approach. This history-altering event, which Jaime Lara describes as "the in-flesh-ment of the Son in visible form,"<sup>29</sup> not only opened the door to salvation through the work on the cross. It also allowed people to hear God *and* to see God, using their own senses. According to Jesus' own words, "When [a man] looks at me, he sees the one who sent me" (John 12:45). On another occasion he said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Other writers were led by the Holy Spirit to echo that same theme. The author of Hebrews described Jesus using these words: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Heb 1:3). The Apostle Paul put it this way: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:15). The significance of Paul's choice of vocabulary is noted by Lara. He says, "The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians (1:15), makes the bold statement that Christ is the *ikon* (image) of the unseen God, which is to say that Christ is himself the visual proclamation of God's salvific love for humanity."<sup>30</sup>

When John began his gospel by describing the incarnate form of Jesus as "the Word," there was clearly a message that God's special revelation placed a strong emphasis on the verbal. Hunt notes, "This was a continuation of the notion that Christianity, like Judaism, was word-dependent."<sup>31</sup> However, it would be an incomplete understanding of John's message if his words in 1:14 are glossed over: "The Word

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<sup>29</sup> Jaime Lara, "Visual Preaching: The Witness of Our Latin Eyes," *Chicago Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 267.

<sup>30</sup> Lara, "Visual Preaching," 267.

<sup>31</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 52.

became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” God the Son became visible so that he could be *seen*. This is forgotten or ignored by some. There is truth to Regier’s observation, “One humorist has noted that ‘the Word became flesh, and then the theologians put it back into words again.’”<sup>32</sup> This is a pitfall that can be avoided by recognizing the consistent manner in which the Incarnation is powerfully described in the New Testament in multisensory terms.

In considering the Incarnation, attention must also be given to the ways in which God the Father confirmed the identity and the mission of the Son. On the night of his birth, his arrival was made known to nearby shepherds. What was significant was not only the verbal message that they heard, but also what they saw. Luke 2:9 describes it in this way: “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” Before a word was spoken, God already had the full attention of these humble men. And at the end of the message, v. 13 speaks of a “great company of the heavenly host” who joined the original angel in proclaiming praise to God.

In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth, it seems reasonable to assume that the Magi’s conviction that a unique king of the Jews had been born was based at least in part on written material that they had somehow collected. However, nothing is said of that in the story. Instead, Matthew recounts in chapter two how the entire quest was focused around a bright star which was such a powerful visual that it drove the Magi far from their homes to seek out and worship this new king.

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<sup>32</sup> Regier, “Audiovisual Support,” 198.

Thirty years later, the time came for Jesus' formal ministry to begin. Jesus obeyed what he sensed was the Father's desire for him to be baptized. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record how God the Father demonstrated his pleasure at Jesus' obedience and his approval of the ministry Jesus was about to embark on in a multisensory manifestation. Luke 3:21-22 says, "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" It is not explained how much of this multisensory demonstration was for Jesus' benefit and how much was for John and the others looking on. What is clear is that, at the critical starting moment of Jesus' ministry, God the Father chose to use both the verbal and the visual to communicate his heart.

A similar pattern was employed a couple of years later when Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a mountain with him where his true glory and majesty were revealed to these three disciples. According to Matthew, Jesus' "face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light" (Matt 17:2). Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared in conversation with Jesus. Then they were all enveloped by a bright cloud that blocked off all sight. Finally, following that intense visual display, "a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (Matt 17:5). Once again God considered it insufficient to communicate this critically important message using just one sense. It needed both sight and sound.

On the morning of Jesus' resurrection, God chose to use the same approach. In Matthew's words, as the women drew near to the tomb, "there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the

stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow” (Matt 28:2-3). This was a visual feast created particularly for the benefit of these women. One might think that words from an angel would be enough to convince anyone of the importance of what was being said. But instead, God sent his messenger to be an earth-shaking, stone-rolling, garment-glowing angelic spokesman. Once he had the women’s undivided attention, he delivered his message: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said” (vv. 5-6). Then the angel said something very interesting to the women. He invited them, “Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples.” After everything the women had already experienced during those intense minutes, this was an acknowledgement that there was nothing that could compare to them seeing for themselves the empty tomb. The angel’s words were simply not enough. They were extremely important, but at that moment more was needed. It had to be communicated in a multisensory manner.

The message of the Bible is that the redemption and salvation of the human race was dependent on God taking the first step, which in fact he did. He revealed himself generally through nature, allowing his wonder, power and creativity to be experienced by people through their senses. He made himself known more specifically to his chosen people through the inspired words of Scripture. This special revelation was not simply with words. It was supported, clarified, and emphasized through visual messages. This is such a powerful aspect of Scripture that, in Robert Smith’s opinion, it could be said that “The Bible is God’s picture book.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 58.

Then there is Jesus. In the Incarnation, God could be both seen and heard more clearly than anytime before or since. Using multisensory means, God the Father confirmed the significance of Jesus' life at each of the key moments: his birth, baptism, transfiguration and resurrection. The uniqueness of this special revelation from God is captured in the words of Stephen Brown:

God did a fair amount of preaching and illustrating. But when He wanted to really make His point, He sent His Son who, among other things, is the consummate illustration. I sometimes forget the preaching of Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; I have trouble on occasion remembering the wisdom of the Proverbs or the inspiration of the Psalms; but I can't get Jesus out of my mind. That's the nature of a good illustration.<sup>34</sup>

### **B. THE ROLE OF THE VISUAL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The Old Testament, with its abundant styles and genres—everything from narratives to courtroom oracles, from the law to thanksgiving psalms—often gives a prominent place to visual elements. There is not a sense in which they were intended to take the place of God's verbal message to people. Rather it appears that the visual tools used were designed to strengthen and reinforce what God had spoken.

An in-depth examination of the ways in which visuals are employed in the Old Testament needs to begin with God himself. In the Old Testament, did God at times choose to use visual techniques in his communication or interaction with humans? Clearly the Almighty God was absolutely free to use any method, both those possible for humans as well as those beyond their ability. It should also be remembered that God, as the Creator of human beings, knows best how they operate, how they learn, and how they remember. All this means that God's choice to use or not use visuals in the Old

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<sup>34</sup> Stephen Brown, "Illustrating the Sermon," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 208.

Testament would be a powerful statement in relation to the use of visuals in today's preaching.

### 1. God's Use of Visuals in the Old Testament

The Israelites in the Old Testament were under strict orders by God himself never to attempt to capture his essence in a visual form. They were not to try to make an image to represent Yahweh, nor were they to be drawn to the gods of the neighbouring nations who were all represented in the form of idols. Instead, the invisible Lord remained a voice, with no visual representation.

However, while that was true for God himself, it was not true for the way in which God taught his people. A search throughout the Old Testament quickly reveals that visuals played a very important role. Rather than being cut off or dismissed as irrelevant, the sense of sight was elevated to a position which often worked hand-in-hand with the spoken and written word.

God made use of visuals when his teaching involved giving instructions to the people. His lessons often included both sound and sight. According to Blackwood, "His sensory teachings were graphic, explicit, and directly connected to the truth he wanted to communicate."<sup>35</sup> At times God even included the senses of smell, taste and touch, such as the Passover meal. It is described in Exodus 12:

That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the

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<sup>35</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 76.

LORD's Passover....Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread....And when your children ask you, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" then tell them, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians" (Exod 12:8-11, 20, 26-27).

This physical meal was also a visual feast for all who participated. One could see the fire, the meat, the herbs, the bread, the clothing, the walking staff, even the way in which the meal was consumed. Taken together, not only did all these sights help the Israelites understand and remember what happened on that fateful night in Egypt. It also provided the perfect opportunity to pass this lesson on to those coming after. In Olcott's words, "During Old Testament times the visual expressed in drama was used to pass the Biblical narrative on from generation to generation. The Passover is a highly dramatic event that used the didactic purpose of drama to teach succeeding generations of God's delivering Israel."<sup>36</sup> All of this was the choice God made at that moment to teach this valuable lesson.

A similar thing could be said of the tabernacle. Each element of the design that God gave to Moses was intended to teach the Israelites something about themselves and/or the Lord. It is the observation of Regier that "The Old Testament tabernacle with all its intricate detail visually demonstrated the way of approach to God through the shedding of blood. Each piece of furniture pictorially communicated its truth."<sup>37</sup> The major pieces of the tabernacle design can be found in Exodus 25-30. Each item is intricately described in those chapters: the Ark of the Covenant (25:10-22), the Table (25:23-28), the Bread of Presence (25:30), the Lampstand (25:31-37), the Curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle (26:31-33), the Altar of

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<sup>36</sup> Olcott, "Use of Multimedia," 26.

<sup>37</sup> Regier, "Audiovisual Support," 198.



Burnt Offering (27:1-8), the garments for the High Priest (28:2-4), the Altar of Incense (30:1-6), and the Wash Basin (30:17-21). Often times great detail is given to ensure that the item had a very specific look.

The visual elements of the tabernacle were so prominent and powerful that even Hunt, who adamantly argues against the use of visuals by preachers and teachers due to what he sees as its close association with paganism, is forced to acknowledge their important role. He puts it this way:

The worship associated with the Tabernacle and the Temple also employed visual imagery. But the...structure, furniture, and decorations of the Tabernacle and Temple were different from the images associated with paganism. Old Testament worship pointed the Israelite to the God of redemption through physical sacrifice....They were propositional in nature, not objects of worship in and of themselves.<sup>38</sup>

The God who refused to be depicted in any form or image whatsoever still chose to design visually his tabernacle in such a way as to teach important lessons to his people, particularly the priests who would be the ones viewing the items most frequently.

On a number of occasions, when the Lord wanted to communicate with foreign kings, he chose to make it a visual message. To the Pharaoh of Egypt he provided two different dreams (Gen 41). Likewise, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon experienced a dream from God early in his reign (Dan 2) as well as in later years (Dan 4). However, his successor, King Belshazzar, was the recipient of an even more graphic divine visual message. Daniel 5 describes how God wrote a message of doom on the wall of the palace with what appeared to be a human hand.

A short, but interesting story is found in Numbers 21:4-9 in which God teaches a lesson on faith to the Israelites by means of an image. After sending poisonous snakes

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<sup>38</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 36.

amongst the people for complaining yet again, God commanded Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Whoever would look upon the snake would be healed and live. That, however, was not the end of the story. The snake surfaces again in the biblical narrative, in 2 Kings 18:4, when King Hezekiah “broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it.” The image God had commanded be made had become a source of idolatry. What had gone wrong? According to Bryan Chapell, “In the [Numbers] narrative the bronze snake as a signifier always pointed away from itself to the thing signified....The bronze snake did not heal; it pointed to God's healing hand and remained appropriate for God's people only as long as it retained its distance as the signifier. When the gap closed—when the signifier was misperceived as the signified—idolatry occurred.”<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note, though, that even such abuse of that image did not dissuade God from using it again. Many years later, as Jesus sought to help Nicodemus understand faith, he compared himself to the very same snake (John 3:14-15). It seems clear the problem was not with the image itself.

Even before the time of the Israelites, the Bible speaks of two occasions when God, in some manner, made himself visible for an encounter with the Patriarchs. The first happened to Abraham in Genesis 18 when he was visited by “three men,” whom we know were in reality two angels and the Lord (Gen 18:1, 19:1). It is not explained why God chose to allow himself to be seen instead of simply speaking to Abraham as he had done on other occasions. What is known is that, shortly before (Gen 17), God had spoken to Abraham, promising him a son through Sarah. That encounter was followed

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<sup>39</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), location 691-693, Kindle e-book.

up with this visit in which the same promise was reiterated, except this time it was a physical, visual event.

Years later, Abraham's grandson, Jacob, had a similar experience. At a time of crisis, when he was full of fear about his upcoming reunion with his brother Esau, it says in Gen 32:24, "So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak." The verses that follow make it clear that this "man" was, in fact, the Lord. This unusual engagement between God and Jacob was multisensory to say the least. For reasons that are not explained, God chose this method at that important moment when he wanted to change Jacob's name to Israel.

Not only did God use visuals when he was teaching through direct verbal instructions, he also taught his people visually through miracles. There were times when God used a visually powerful miracle in order to try to draw his people back to himself after they had drifted away. A prime example would be the contest waged on Mount Carmel between the prophet Elijah and the 850 prophets of the false gods Baal and Asherah. In 1 Kgs 18:19-21, it says,

"Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

The false prophets were given most of the day to wail and beg and plead with their gods, but to no avail. No answer was forthcoming. When it was Elijah's turn, a simple prayer from him was all that was needed. The Lord was just waiting to *show* the Israelites who the true God was. "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that

you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench” (1 Kgs 18:37-38). This was an epic battle for the people’s hearts. And the weapon God chose to use was almost entirely visual.

God utilized the power of visual miracles for faithful followers as well. When King Hezekiah was sick, God sent a supernatural wonder as a confirmation that could be seen by Hezekiah’s own eyes:

Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, “What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the temple of the LORD on the third day from now?” Isaiah answered, “This is the LORD’s sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?” “It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps,” said Hezekiah. “Rather, have it go back ten steps.” Then the prophet Isaiah called upon the LORD, and the LORD made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz (2 Kgs 20:8-11).

Interestingly, God had already given a direct verbal promise to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah. But Hezekiah needed more. Rather than being angry, God had anticipated Hezekiah’s request and willingly provided him with the visual proof which ultimately satisfied the king’s heart.

God also used visual elements in another form of teaching—the giving of visions. For example, Scripture describes how God communicated with Abraham several times by what seems to have been a voice that he clearly heard, either physically or in his heart. However, on one occasion, at the time when the Lord renewed his covenant with Abraham and solemnly promised him an heir in the form of a son, God chose to alter his *modus operandi*. Evidence suggests that God actually adopted a culturally familiar covenant form which was highly multisensory. J. Arthur Thompson explains the custom:

“Religious ceremonies involving the slaughter of a beast were associated with each treaty....A common element in the cursing formula in some treaties is: ‘Just as this [beast] is cut up, so may X be cut up.’”<sup>40</sup> By walking between the pieces of the animal which had been cut in half, the one taking the covenant was acknowledging that that would be his fate were he to break the covenant. This is an exact description of what God did when he renewed his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, which reads:

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?” So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.” Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half....As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him....When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (Gen 15: 8-10, 12, 17-18).

God used this powerfully visual dream to communicate to Abraham his rock-solid intention of keeping this covenant with his servant. Rob Bell summarizes God’s message in a fresh way: “The covenant. ‘Okay, cut some animal in half. Walk down the middle. Say to the person, “I’ll be like these animals if I don’t keep my end of the deal.”’ God takes these concepts and puts them in dirt and blood and flesh and bones and wood and steel.”<sup>41</sup>

In reading through the books of the prophets, it can be seen that teaching through visions continued to be a powerful approach used by God. Ezekiel had a vision of a valley of dry bones that God brought back to life (Ezek 37:1-14). God caused Daniel to

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<sup>40</sup> J. Arthur Thompson, “Covenant (OT),” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:791.

<sup>41</sup> “The Subversive Art: Leadership Interview with Rob Bell,” *Leadership* 25, no 2 (Spring 2004): 29.

have a dream about four beasts (Dan 7:1-14) and later a vision of a ram and a goat (Dan 8:1-14). Amos also received messages from God in the form of visions. He saw visions of locusts, fire and a plumb line (Amos 7:1-9) as well as a vision of a basket of ripe fruit (Amos 8:1-2). Nearly half of the book of Zechariah is set aside for recounting the many visions God gave to him and the resulting oracles. They included:

- A vision of a man on a red horse (1:7-17)
- A vision of four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-20)
- A vision of a man with a measuring line (2:1-2)
- A vision of filthy and clean clothes for the high priest (3:1-5)
- A vision of a gold lampstand and two olive trees (4:1-3)
- A vision of a flying scroll (5:1-2)
- A vision of a woman with a measuring bowl (5:5-8)
- A vision of four chariots (6:1-3)

The obviously important role that these many visions played in the Old Testament is so difficult to deny that they force Hunt to backtrack and admit:

I do not mean to imply that God is opposed to all forms of visual imagery....There are many examples in the Bible where God utilizes imagery to communicate propositional truths. Prophetic visions, divine dreams, even pantomime...are some of the more dramatic forms of communication found in Scripture.<sup>42</sup>

Even the very word that is used for this experience, “vision,” is, of course, related to the sense of sight.

The same is true for two of the three names used for prophets in the Old Testament. These are the people through whom God did most of his communication

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<sup>42</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 35-36.

during that era. The three main prophetic titles all show up in 1 Chr 29:29, which reads, “As for the events of King David’s reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer.” In this verse Nathan is labelled as a prophet (נָבִיא - *nābî’*), Samuel as a seer (רֹאֵה - *rō’eh*) and Gad as a seer (חֹזֶה - *hōzeh*).

The name which is most commonly used in the Old Testament is נָבִיא . It is usually understood to mean “spokesman for God.”<sup>43</sup> A. A. MacRae defines it as “one who passes on a message from God.”<sup>44</sup> This title seems to place the emphasis on the spoken and/or written word. The other two names, רֹאֵה and חֹזֶה, “preserve awareness that God sometimes made revelation to the prophets by visions, i.e. ‘seeing.’”<sup>45</sup>

The name רֹאֵה is the Qal participle of the verb *rā’â*, which means “to see, look at, inspect.” The participle then is understood as “one who sees,” consistently translated “seer.” The use of the word suggests that “the act of seeing God’s message (by dreams or visions) was so important” that a prophet was sometimes referred to as a seer.<sup>46</sup> The word was periodically used of Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 9:9), which, according to MacRae, “emphasized Samuel’s supposed ability to see present or future facts that were invisible to others.”<sup>47</sup> The other word translated “seer” is חֹזֶה. It is derived from a less common verb *hāzâ*, generally translated to mean “to look, see, behold, prophesy, provide.”<sup>48</sup> It has

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<sup>43</sup> Robert D. Culver, “חֹזֶה,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:275.

<sup>44</sup> A. A. MacRae, “Prophets and Prophecy,” in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 4:875.

<sup>45</sup> Culver, “חֹזֶה,” 275.

<sup>46</sup> Robert D. Culver, “רֹאֵה,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:823.

<sup>47</sup> MacRae, “Prophets,” 877.

<sup>48</sup> Culver, “חֹזֶה,” 274.

been suggested that this verb “perhaps emphasizes the idea of gazing or looking intently.”<sup>49</sup>

What is the significance of the name “seer” being applied to the prophets? It is important because it reflects the different forms in which God gave messages to his servants. MacRae delineates four primary approaches that God used when communicating with his prophets. There was the *external voice* (1 Sam 3:3-9) which was audible and the *internal voice* (1 Kgs 13:18-22) which was inaudible, heard only by the prophet. God communicated by *opening the prophet’s eyes* (2 Kgs 6:15-17) which “was the divine enabling of a prophet to see realities that were invisible to ordinary eyes.” And finally, God used a *vision or imaginary picture* (Ezek 37) which could be passed on to those who listened to the prophet.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note, then, that God’s use of visual means to teach his people was so prominent that it even impacted the names used for those who received and passed on those messages.

## 2. People’s Use of Visuals in the Old Testament

Of course, God was not the only one during the Old Testament period to make use of the power of images. Many of his prophets followed his example, and often times even his direct commands, to make use of visual elements in their messages to their listeners. Some have tried to play down this aspect of the prophetic ministry, stressing instead the importance of the verbal message. For example, Donald Whitney argues, “God ordained preaching in the Old Testament. He could have dropped down some sort of visual images like photographs or paintings describing what He wanted people to

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<sup>49</sup> MacRae, “Prophets,” 877.

<sup>50</sup> MacRae, “Prophets,” 880.



know....Instead He spoke through the preaching of prophets.”<sup>51</sup> It would indeed be difficult to argue against the importance of the prophet’s role of preaching and proclaiming. But at the same time, failure to acknowledge the significant place of images in the prophetic message exposes either an unawareness of Scripture or, even worse, a deliberate attempt to mold and shape the Bible to conform to one’s personal viewpoint.

When God wanted his people to hear and understand spiritual truths, even abstract ones, he often instructed his prophets to rely on the help of images. Robert Smith puts it this way: “Throughout the Bible, an ensemble of literary eyewitnesses provides visual snapshots of doctrinal lessons that God wants to teach His people.”<sup>52</sup> The reason visuals were employed was “to drive home an important message,” “to arouse people’s curiosity and induce them to listen,” or, at times, “to deliver a message unpalatable to their listeners.”<sup>53</sup> Many times, it would seem, the addition of simply more words would not have accomplished this. There were occasions when God chose to have his messengers take a more multisensory approach. In Blackwood’s words, “[His prophets] used verbal communication mixed with visual elements as well as interactive techniques to heighten the levels of attention, understanding, and memory of the people.”<sup>54</sup>

How did the prophets do this? What was their approach? Most often we find them employing objects as part of their message. Robert Smith refers to this as the “show and tell” method.<sup>55</sup> For example, in that culture, oil was a very common part of life. It was utilized for a wide variety of purposes. However, using oil to anoint someone’s head was at times a visual way of declaring God’s choice of that person for a

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<sup>51</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, location 1038-1040, Kindle e-book.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Smith, *Doctrine*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> MacRae, “Prophets,” 882.

<sup>54</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Smith, *Doctrine*, 65.

leadership role. It was used for priests, as demonstrated in Exod 30:30, when God commanded Moses, “Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.” In 1 Sam 16:13, Samuel anointed David to show that God had chosen him to be the next king of Israel. And Elijah was given these instructions by God in 1 Kgs 19:16: “Anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.” The oil itself had no supernatural physical properties. Its power lay in the potent visual message it conveyed to those who received it and witnessed it.

Moses sent an unmistakable message to the children of Israel when he smashed the two stone tablets to pieces because of their worship of the golden calf (Ex 32:19). This was not just an angry outburst. It was a visual depiction of the fact that their blatant idolatry had broken the covenant they had just established with Yahweh.

Joshua’s “show and tell” objects of choice were large stones. Before crossing into the Promise Land, the following command was given by Moses:

When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster (Deut 27:2-4).

After God had safely brought them into Canaan, Joshua made certain that this command was fully obeyed (Josh 8:30-32). But by that point, Joshua already had experience with using large stones as powerful visual lessons. As the people of Israel were ready to cross the Jordan River, Joshua gathered together 12 men and gave them these instructions:

Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell

them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever. So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down (Josh 4:5-8).

Interestingly, it appears from v. 9 that Joshua was so taken with the idea that he decided also to create a stone memorial in the middle of the Jordan as well as at their camp. They served as constant reminders of God's miraculous care for the Israelites who crossed the Jordan River, and as a great teaching tool for future generations. At the end of the book of Joshua, it is fitting that the last thing the Bible records him doing as leader of the children of Israel was to use a large stone as a witness to their renewal of the covenant with Yahweh (Josh 24:26-27).

Later prophets also used physical objects to teach visually their message from the Lord. Ahijah tore up his new cloak, giving Jeroboam ten pieces with the message that the ten northern tribes would break away from the Davidic dynasty to form the Northern Kingdom under his rule (1 Kgs 11:29-31). Zechariah made a crown for the high priest as a statement of future hope. In Zech 6:11-12 God commanded him: "Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord.'"

Jeremiah's lengthy ministry was also filled with examples of "show and tell," with objects conveying with great force the vitally important messages he had been called upon to deliver. In chapter 13, Jeremiah was instructed by the Lord to buy and bury a linen belt, allowing it to be ruined in the same way that God was going to ruin the pride

of the Israelites. He visited a potter's house in chapter 18, pointing out to those gathered around that God is sovereign over his people in the same way that a potter has the power to shape and reshape the clay pot he is making. In the following chapter, Jeremiah once again made use of a clay pot, this time smashing it to pieces. God told him, "Break the jar while those who go with you are watching, and say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired'" (Jer 19:10-11). After the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is taken against his will to Egypt, where he buries some large stones as part of his message of doom to the Jewish survivors who had fled to Egypt in disobedience to God (Jer 43:9-10). Finally, it is interesting that the very last action of Jeremiah as recorded in his book was a "show and tell" lesson. He wrote out an oracle on a scroll and sent it to Babylon with these instructions: "When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud....When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall'" (Jer 51:61, 63-64).

Ezekiel was also known to use the occasional object in his preaching. In chapter 21, he traced two roads in the dirt and then erected a signpost, supposedly to direct the coming Babylonians. Later, he labeled two sticks as "Judah" and "Joseph" for his message of the future unity of the tribes of Israel (Ezek 37:15-19).

However, Ezekiel is better known for a different type of visual message. He made great use of dramatization, or what one author terms "a walking three-dimensional

visual object lesson.”<sup>56</sup> While such a method often employed objects, it also included the speaker as part of the visual presentation.

Ezekiel 4 and 5 describe an elaborate dramatization of the coming siege of Jerusalem. It began with a clay model of Jerusalem surrounded by siege works, ramps, battering rams and enemy camps. God instructed Ezekiel to “take a sharp sword and use it as a barber’s razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair” (Ezek 5:1). Next he prepared food to be rationed in small daily portions for the main part of the lesson. He had to lay on his left side facing his model for 390 days, followed by 40 more days on his right side. The final act of this drama is found in Ezek 5:2, which says, “When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of [your cut] hair inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind.” This was not the first time that God’s people had encountered a message of the impending punishment due to their disobedience. However, this approach by Ezekiel must certainly have made a deep impression on those who witnessed it.

The same could be said for the lesson which was acted out in Ezek 12. In verses 3-6, the coming exile is depicted visually in the following way:

Therefore, son of man, pack your belongings for exile and in the daytime, as they watch, set out and go from where you are to another place. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious people. During the daytime, while they watch, bring out your belongings packed for exile. Then in the evening, while they are watching, go out like those who go into exile. While they watch, dig through the wall and take your belongings out through it. Put them on your shoulder as they are watching and carry them out at dusk. Cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have made you a sign to the Israelites.

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<sup>56</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 77.

Another great example of dramatization was when Jeremiah made a yoke and wore it around, apparently for some time, to demonstrate the need for Judah (and other neighbouring countries) to submit to Babylon. In Jer 27, it is depicted in this way:

This is what the LORD said to me: “Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck. Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah”....I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, “Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live” (Jer 27:2-3, 12).

One dramatization which must have turned a lot of heads was performed by the prophet Isaiah. According to Isa 20, God directed him to go around without clothes on! In verses 2-5 it says,

At that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz. He said to him, “Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.” And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot. Then the LORD said, “Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared—to Egypt's shame. Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame.”

Whether such a graphic visual lesson actually meant that Isaiah “simply laid aside his outer garment”<sup>57</sup> or that he literally went without clothes, this was an image which would have been permanently impressed in the minds of all those who saw it.

There was a third way in which the prophets taught using visual elements. Blackwood calls this method the “real life multisensory sermon.”<sup>58</sup> It happened when God took an actual event that was happening in the life of a prophet, and utilized it to communicate a message to the people. For example, when Isaiah had a son born to him, God instructed the child to be named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which meant “quick to the

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<sup>57</sup> MacRae, “Prophets,” 883.

<sup>58</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 76.

plunder, swift to the spoil” (Isa 8:1-4). Every time people saw the boy and heard his name, they would be reminded of the coming conquerors from Assyria. The prophet Jeremiah was told by the Lord to buy a field from a near relative, even though Jerusalem was under siege by the mighty Babylonian army. The reason was to express visually this message of hope: “For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land” (Jer 32:15).

Such “real life sermons” could at times be very difficult and painful for the prophet. Ezekiel was given a one-day warning of the coming death of his wife. But God gave him firm direction about how he was allowed to respond:

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners.” So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded (Ezek 24:15-18).

This was not callous cruelty on the part of the Lord. He wanted to remind the people in a startling way about the coming suffering they would face because of their sin.

One of the most dramatic examples of “real life sermons” came from Hosea. In chapter 1 he was commanded by God to marry a prostitute, making her and her illegitimate children his family. When they had children, one of them he named Lo-Ruhamah (“not loved”) and another he named Lo-Ammi (“not my people”). As difficult as all this must have been, it later grew worse. She apparently left him and had a relationship with another man. But the visual lessons for the Israelites were not finished. In chapter 5 it says, “The LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the

Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’ So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley” (Hos 5:1-2).

During the period of the Old Testament, it has been seen that it was not unusual for God to use powerful visual images to communicate with his people. He used them in his instructions, he used them when he performed miracles, and he used them when he revealed visions to his prophets. It is also evident that the Lord sanctioned, and indeed often commanded, his prophets to employ visual elements in their messages, using objects, drama and even situations they experienced in their own lives. This allowed people to see as well as hear what God was communicating. Chapell summarizes it in this way: “The communication style of Moses and the Prophets seems to imply that neither images nor statements may stand by themselves.”<sup>59</sup> God’s choice to use both the verbal and the visual makes a potent, positive statement about the use of visuals in today’s preaching.

### **C. THE ROLE OF THE VISUAL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Moving ahead into the New Testament era, what is the message that is found there regarding preaching? What are the roles of the verbal and the visual when it comes to communicating the Gospel? Does the relationship between seeing and hearing change after the coming of Christ and the establishment of his Church? Such a change of direction, if it exists, would be significant. Are there instructions, either direct or indirect, about preaching in the New Testament? What can be learned by studying the teaching methods of prominent New Testament figures, especially Christ himself? Does

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<sup>59</sup> Chapell, *Using Illustrations*, location 328.



such an exercise lead one away from using visuals while preaching or does it actually encourage such an approach? These important questions need to be answered before a clear biblical foundation can be established for today's preachers on the use of visuals during preaching.

### 1. The New Testament Teaching about Preaching

Even though, according to the New Testament, preaching is one of the central activities of the Church, there appears to be little direct teaching about the ministry of preaching. One passage that does address this activity is Rom 10. After describing how anyone can call upon the Lord's name to be saved, Paul goes on to describe the process that God usually uses to bring someone to himself:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?...Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Rom 10:14-15, 17).

Therein lies the great mystery of God's plan to save the world. The Bible never explains *why* God chose to use imperfect humans to be the carriers of the Good News. It only states that that was his choice of strategy. Whitney, expressing wonder at this truth, describes how God could have used any number of methods for this task: angels, clouds, stars, even his own voice. Then he says,

But for reasons known only to Himself, He has chosen none of these means. Instead he has determined that He would reveal Himself to people through His Word by means of *preaching*. Therefore preaching is always relevant, no matter what a majority of people thinks in any particular culture at a given point in history, because it is God's idea.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, location 1015-1018, Kindle e-book.

In Paul's view, preaching was central to God's plan of salvation. He urged Timothy to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). In the following chapter he explained the respect that was to be afforded to those who were elders, with a noteworthy addition. "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17). Preaching was indeed God's idea. And it had a strong emphasis on the verbal element. But is that the end of the story? Olcott raises an interesting point when he asks, "But does this constraint completely and totally eliminate the use of multimedia to accentuate or enhance a sermon as an introduction, conclusion, anecdote, or illustration might? Is verbal proclamation the only theologically sound means to preach Christ?"<sup>61</sup> These are important questions which need to be addressed. Is it necessary for the verbal and visual elements of a sermon to be an either/or choice? Is it an "all or nothing" situation? In other words, must preaching be seen as verbal only or else one is accused of wanting to get rid of the spoken word altogether? It would seem quite possible to acknowledge the importance, even the primacy, of the verbal in preaching, while at the same time supporting preaching methods, such as using physical objects, which seek to strengthen, not supplant what is spoken. What does the New Testament say about this issue?

There are several verses in Paul's letters to the Corinthian church that may shed some light on what preaching meant to him. First Corinthians 1:21 (NASB) says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who

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<sup>61</sup> Olcott, "Use of Multimedia," 19.

believe.” What is immediately clear once again from this verse is that preaching is God’s choice for communicating the Gospel to the world. The part of this verse that requires a deeper investigation is what Paul intended when he used the word “preached.” The term he used was κήρυγμα (*kērygma*). According to Whitney, this is significant since it “implies more than just proclamation, because there is another Greek word [εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizō*)] that is used for the idea of proclaiming or announcing the Good News about Jesus. If Paul meant to describe the generic proclamation of God’s Word in all forms, then he could have chosen that other word.”<sup>62</sup> Is this an accurate understanding of these two terms? Can it be said that εὐαγγελίζω should be understood as the unadorned proclamation of the Word, while κήρυγμα refers to preaching which is more than just proclamation? According to *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, κήρυγμα, which is derived from κηρύσσω, is defined as “proclamation, announcement, preaching”.<sup>63</sup> Barclay Newman, in *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, gives the following meaning: “proclaim, make known, preach.”<sup>64</sup> The main difference between these two definitions is the broader connotation of “make known,” since that could imply more than strictly verbal. That impression is consistent with the way the word is used in the description of Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus’ message is described in a multisensory fashion. Jesus is depicted as “teaching...and preaching...and healing” (Matt 4:23; 9:35). In addition, the ministry assigned by Jesus to his disciples follows a similar pattern (Matt 10:7-8). Coenen points

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<sup>62</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, location 1019-1027, Kindle e-book.

<sup>63</sup> Lothar Coenen, “κηρύσσω,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:48.

<sup>64</sup> Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), s.v. “κηρύσσω.”

out the importance of this, stating, “All this is to say that the event of proclamation is surrounded by objective instruction and by events and actions which symbolically make known the dawn and the power of the new age.”<sup>65</sup> Through the teaching and preaching, the healing and casting out demons, the Kingdom was being made known in multisensory ways. And the message was more powerful because of it. Gerhard Friedrich describes it this way:

As there is no sacrament without the Word, so there is no miracle without the preacher of God’s act. Hence the NT crowd is not simply astonished at the miracles, as in the miracles stories [sic] of Hellenism. It is also astonished at the doctrine or Word proclaimed....Signs accompany the Word. Their office is simply to confirm what is proclaimed.<sup>66</sup>

How does the word εὐαγγελίζω compare to the multisensory connotation found in κήρυγμα? Initially, it would seem that Whitney is correct in asserting that it means the basic proclamation of the Good News. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* defines εὐαγγελίζω “to bring or announce good news, proclaim, preach.”<sup>67</sup> This emphasis on the verbal is stressed by Ulrich Becker, who says, “However varied may be the emphasis and development of the term *euangelion* in the NT, the reference is always to the oral proclamation of the message of salvation....”<sup>68</sup> But an understanding of this word may not be quite so straightforward. Friedrich offers an alternate viewpoint, declaring, “εὐαγγελίσεσθαι is not just speaking and preaching; it is proclamation with full authority and power. Signs and wonders accompany the

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<sup>65</sup> Coenen, “κήρυσσω,” 57.

<sup>66</sup> Gerhard Friedrich, “κήρυξ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 3:714.

<sup>67</sup> Ulrich Becker, “εὐαγγέλιον,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 2:107.

<sup>68</sup> Becker, “εὐαγγέλιον,” 113.

evangelical message. They belong together, for the Word is powerful and effective.”<sup>69</sup>

This nuance is reflected in Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist confirming his messiahship: “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matt 11:4-5). In addition, in Luke 9:1-2, the disciples were sent out by Jesus for a ministry of preaching and healing, but this time it is the word εὐαγγελίζω which is used for preaching in this multisensory context.

It should be noted though that both of these words, despite this visual nuance, give primary emphasis to verbal proclamation. God’s message needs to be expressed in words. However, a rigid “verbal only” interpretation of preaching based on these words also seems inappropriate.

Another reference which Paul makes to preaching in his letters to the Corinthians is found in 1 Cor 2:1-5. In describing his ministry among them, Paul says,

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

These verses give insight into Paul’s concept of the ministry of preaching. He describes both the things which were “non-negotiables” as well as the practices he avoided. Unlike those who were willing to preach in a way which sacrificed content for excitement, Paul stressed that *what* is said is far more important than *how* it is said. In other words, content matters.

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<sup>69</sup> Gerhard Friedrich, “εὐαγγελίζομαι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 2:720.

Some theologians, such as Whitney, connect this directly to the “verbal versus visual” debate. He states, “Modern communication theory may emphasize image and imply that what you say is not as important as how you say it, but God inspired the apostle Paul to tell the Corinthians (and us) that just the opposite is true: the message is the measure of the kind of preaching God wants you to hear.”<sup>70</sup> While his emphasis on the message is helpful, Whitney depicts “image” as the opposite of “content.” However, is that an accurate understanding of what Paul is addressing? Paul is, in fact, criticizing certain speaking practices which were being used by some people. Ironically, if anyone was using a visual element when he preached, it appears to be Paul who was not afraid to use a “demonstration of the Spirit’s power” along with his verbal message.

Some have seen Paul’s words as a statement railing against such things as style of rhetoric, persuasive speech, etc. According to John MacArthur, “[Paul’s] goal as a preacher was not to entertain people with his rhetorical style or to amuse them with cleverness, humor, novel insights, or sophisticated methodology—he simply preached Christ crucified.”<sup>71</sup> It seems likely all would agree that Paul’s goal was not to entertain. Yet “entertaining” is not the same as seeking to do all in one’s power to persuade someone of the truth. The accounts of Paul’s sermons and the numerous letters he wrote make it abundantly clear that Paul did indeed understand and use words in a powerful way to convince his listeners to believe. In the words of Gordon Fee:

His letters, which at times have all the character of speech, are in fact powerful examples of rhetoric and persuasion. Nonetheless Paul can confidently assert before those who have come to care about such things that his preaching was not one of this kind. This seems to make certain

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<sup>70</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, location 1092-1094, Kindle e-book.

<sup>71</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 45.

that it is not rhetoric in general, but rhetoric of a very specific and well-known kind, that he is disavowing.<sup>72</sup>

Sometimes 2 Cor 4:2 is used by those who seek to emphasize the need to preach “plainly,” instead of being crafty and clever in the delivery of the Word. In the verse, Paul declares, “but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (NASB). It should be noted that the word “craftiness” (πανουργία) has a more sinister meaning than this English term sometimes implies. It indicates “a cunning readiness to adopt any device or trickery for the achievement of ends which are anything but altruistic.”<sup>73</sup> The issue in the verse is openness versus deceit and secret motivations. It speaks of Paul’s practice of preaching the truth “openly” more than “plainly”. This is seen in Philip Hughes’ comment: “So far from being marked by subterfuge, self-interest, and deceit, however, Paul’s ministry was one in which the truth was manifested, openly displayed, outspokenly proclaimed (cf. 3:12f.), in such a manner that none could gainsay the genuineness and sincerity of his motives.”<sup>74</sup>

These verses in 1 and 2 Corinthians have been used by some theologians to help promote views of preaching that might be considered extreme. MacArthur confidently asserts, “We don’t need clever approaches to get people saved. (1 Cor. 1:21) We simply need to get back to preaching the truth and planting the seed. If we’re faithful in that, the

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<sup>72</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle of the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 94.

<sup>73</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 123.

<sup>74</sup> Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, 124.

soil God has prepared will bear fruit.”<sup>75</sup> While at first glance this may sound pious, what, in fact, does “get back to preaching the truth” mean? A pastor who stands and blandly reads pages and pages of notes in a monotone voice could fit the description of “preaching the truth,” but who would honestly encourage such behaviour? An approach like that certainly does not reflect what is found in Scripture about preaching. Perhaps it would be better to say “we simply need to get back to preaching the truth *in as clear a way as possible* and the soil God has prepared will bear fruit.” That would certainly be following the model previously examined in the Old Testament. And, as will be seen, it would be imitating the methodology used by Jesus himself during his ministry here on earth.

## 2. Jesus and Visuals

Jesus has often been considered the Master Teacher. Even people who refuse to acknowledge Jesus’ divine nature still notice the huge impact that his teaching made. Jesus had the ability to connect with people in ways which radically changed lives. Roy Zuck describes it in this way: “Were people in Jesus’ day interested in what he taught? Indeed they were! They were curious, intrigued, even captivated....Teachers today do well to learn from Jesus’ teaching by stimulating and motivating their students, varying their methods, encouraging learners to participate, and visualizing what they verbalize.”<sup>76</sup>

Can Jesus be described as visualizing what he was verbalizing? The answer to that question will have an enormous bearing on the appropriateness of modern preachers using visuals while they are in the pulpit. Although some authors disparage the

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<sup>75</sup> John MacArthur, “Gimme That Showtime Religion,” *Grace to You*, 2014, final paragraph, accessed October 25, 2014, <http://www.gty.org/resources/Articles/A163/Gimme-That-Showtime-Religion>.

<sup>76</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 178.



utilization of visuals during a sermon as “the newest fad,” others have insisted that a careful look at Jesus’ methodology proves this is not the case. For example, Blackwood maintains “What we are seeing today in terms of multisensory teaching is not so much a revolution as it is a revival. Jesus used vines, branches, coins, water, wheat, wheatfields, children, and all sorts of visual aids to graphically communicate divine truth.”<sup>77</sup> If Jesus felt it was necessary, or at the very least most effective, to aid his listeners’ learning by employing their sense of sight, it would seem that the burden of proof would lie in the hands of those who do not favour the use of objects during preaching. In other words, it can be assumed that those teaching God’s Word *should* be using visuals unless clear reasons can be brought forward to prove otherwise. This perspective is echoed in Bell’s words: “I use a lot of props and visuals. People are like, ‘You use your props and stuff. I’m just into *biblical* preaching.’ Well, find me a person in the Scriptures who doesn’t use visuals. Jesus said, ‘Look at those birds, look at the tree.’”<sup>78</sup>

“Look at those birds, look at the tree.” Most of the objects that found their way into Jesus’ lessons were from nature. This makes sense since Jesus was often outdoors when he was instructing his followers. In fact, knowing how intentional Jesus was in every aspect of his ministry, it seems highly likely that there were times when Jesus chose where he and his followers would go on a particular day so that he could use a certain visual in his teaching. Did he save his comparisons to sheep and shepherds for a day when they would be passing by a flock on the hillside? While the possibility of such an approach is strong, it does remain in the realm of speculation. What is known for certain is that there were many times when he did include natural objects in his teaching.

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<sup>77</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 77.

<sup>78</sup> “Interview with Rob Bell,” 28.

In Mark 11, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus uttered a curse against a fig tree, which withered overnight and was used by Jesus the following day as a teaching tool for his disciples. Zuck reflects on the long-lasting effect of this demonstration, saying, “Fig trees would thereafter no doubt cause them to think of his teaching about faith and prayer.”<sup>79</sup> But on that occasion Jesus wasn’t yet finished with his use of visuals. He referred to the very hill under their feet, probably the Mount of Olives, saying, “Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to *this* mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him” (Mark 11:22-23, emphasis added). This wasn’t the only time Jesus used a mountain as a visual. Jesus gave his disciples the same lesson about faith following the Transfiguration when he healed a boy who had been demon possessed (Matt 17:20).

Jesus was creative in finding ways to connect the message he wanted to communicate with items at hand. When speaking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus pointed to the water in the well and said, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst” (John 4:13-14). At a different time, Jesus used a mulberry bush to drive home to his disciples the power of true faith (Luke 17:6).

In Matt 6, Jesus was teaching his listeners about not worrying. He said,

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?...And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these (Matt 6:26, 28).

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<sup>79</sup> Zuck, *Teaching*, 177.

The word translated in the NIV as “look at the birds” is ἐμβλέψατε, which derives from ἐμβλέπω. Zerwick and Grosvenor define this term as “look with some attention.”<sup>80</sup>

According to *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ἐμβλέπω means “look, look at, look in the face, consider. The word usually signifies a look of interest, love or concern.”<sup>81</sup>

The term employed in v. 28, translated “see how the lilies” in the NIV, is καταμάθετε which is derived from καταμανθάνω. While this verb has to do with seeing, it goes beyond the simple use of the sense of sight. It also involves the mind. It is the ability to “see and perceive,” to understand the importance of what it is you are actually looking at.<sup>82</sup>

Luke, in the parallel passage (Luke 12:24, 27), chose to use the verb κατανόεω, which Günther Harder defines as “notice, observe, consider, contemplate.”<sup>83</sup> J. Behm gives an even more detailed description: “As a verb of seeing...κατανόεω, esp. in Lk., where it is most common, denotes perception by the eyes,...attentive scrutiny of an object,...the observation or consideration of a fact or process, whether natural or miraculous.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981), 17.

<sup>81</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, “ἐμβλέπω,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:519.

<sup>82</sup> K. H. Rengstorf, “μανθάνω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:414-415.

<sup>83</sup> Günther Harder, “νοεῖν,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:122.

<sup>84</sup> J. Behm, “νοεῖν,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4: 975.

It is interesting that all three of these verbs, ἐμβλέπω, καταμανθάνω and κατανοέω, carry one meaning which refers to the thoughtful use of the eyes as well as a different meaning which stresses contemplation. In considering the issue of preaching with physical objects, it is important to determine which definition was in the Lord's mind when this teaching was first given. Was Jesus referencing something that everyone could see, or was it more of an abstract point which the audience was to think about? For many of today's listeners, the study of God's Word happens in classrooms and church buildings. Without thinking, commands by Jesus such as "look at" and "observe" are understood, by default, in the more abstract fashion—i.e. a point which needs to be considered—since none of the things he spoke of can readily be seen. However the people who originally heard this message did so in a very different context. The teaching took place outside. As they were listening to Jesus, birds were flying overhead. In the grass nearby, flowers were growing. Which was more likely, that Jesus wanted people to open their eyes and see what he was pointing at or to close their eyes to all that surrounded them so they could contemplate?

A couple of other examples share a similar situation. In Luke 21, Jesus was describing to his disciples the signs which would indicate the end of the age. In v. 29, he says, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near." It seems plausible, if not likely, that Jesus was referring to the trees which they could see around them. The same could be said of Jesus' teaching about evangelism in John 4. In verse 35 he urged the Twelve, "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." Such a statement accompanied by this visual would

make a lasting impact on the Twelve. As Zuck points out, “How could the disciples ever forget this impressive image of the lost?”<sup>85</sup> They would never look at a harvest in the same way again.

Jesus not only used objects from nature. He was also willing to utilize man-made items as well. One of the clearest examples came when Jesus’ enemies tried to trap him with a question about the highly volatile subject of taxes. The events are told in Matt 22:17-21:

“Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Jesus often fielded questions, sometimes by people genuinely wanting his guidance, and at other times by people trying to catch him in a mistake. With this particular question, though, he decided to use a visual to make his point. He called for a coin so he could hold it up in front of his listeners. One can almost visualize the event as it unfolded. Dave McClellan highlights Jesus’ method of teaching, saying, “Can you imagine the curiosity asking for a coin aroused? Jesus had their undivided attention.”<sup>86</sup> The Bible states that what he said in his answer amazed the people and left his enemies speechless (Luke 20:26). However, the simple coin held up for everyone to see added tremendous power to Jesus’ words, gaining the listeners’ interest and imprinting his teaching on their memories.

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<sup>85</sup> Zuck, *Teaching*, 176.

<sup>86</sup> Dave McClellan, “Suspense,” *Leadership* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 55.

On another occasion, Jesus used the temple building itself to make his point. In Matt 24:2, he declared to his disciples who were in awe of that vast human construction, “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” Jerusalem’s destruction was coming. The extent of that destruction was vividly painted using the very building that gave the Jewish people so much pride.

However, surely the most striking use of visuals by Jesus came on the night before his arrest and crucifixion. In the opinion of Glenn O’Neal, “One of the most vivid examples of the use of objects to present a truth is in the communion service where Christ takes the bread and the cup to symbolize His body and His blood.”<sup>87</sup> Matthew recounted the event in this way: “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matt 26:26-28). Due to the way in which Jesus’ teaching that night was so sensory-focused, Blackwood describes the Lord’s Supper as “the ultimate form of multisensory teaching, because it interfaces with all five of our senses.”<sup>88</sup>

Without too much effort, it is easy to find numerous examples of Jesus employing objects as part of his teaching. But his use of visuals extended beyond just objects. There were many examples of when he actually used people as visuals in his teaching. A poor widow was brought to the attention of the disciples in Mark 12. “Sacrifice, motives in giving, and the relative value of money were lessons burned in the hearts of the

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<sup>87</sup> Glenn O’Neal, *Make the Bible Live: A Basic Guide for Preachers and Teachers* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), 76.

<sup>88</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 78.

disciples” as Jesus pointed out her humble act of giving, especially in contrast with the prideful, flashy offerings of the rich.<sup>89</sup> It is likely that the woman was never even aware of the role she played in Jesus’ lesson. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus extended a call to Peter and Andrew to follow him as his disciples. But he did it using a visual that they themselves were in the process of acting out—fishing. In Mark 1:16-17, it says, “As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’”

Jesus also liked pointing out people who were commonly considered sinful and worthless, thereby demonstrating their value in the eyes of God. When the tax collector, Zaccheus, turned his life around as a result of being with Jesus, the Saviour allowed him to be a visual confirmation that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). Luke also tells the story of when Jesus used a prostitute who gratefully cleaned and perfumed his feet to teach a lesson about forgiveness to an arrogant Pharisee (Luke 7:44-50).

Jesus’ teachings were often revolutionary, radically challenging the status quo thinking around him. What he said often left people either speechless or buzzing with questions as they sought to process his new ideas. If there was ever a teacher who could get by with his words alone, it was Jesus. Yet, there were many times when he was simply not satisfied with that. He raised the teaching up to an even greater level of effectiveness by employing visuals. One day Jesus invited a little child over and wrapped him in his arms as he explained to the Twelve what greatness in the Kingdom looked like

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<sup>89</sup> Zuck, *Teaching*, 177.

(Matt 18:1-4; Mark 9:34-37). Zuck captures the great power in Jesus' technique, saying, "How much more forceful for Jesus to have them see a child as he encouraged them to become like children, rather than simply verbalizing his point. Every time they saw a child, would they not recall his incisive words?"<sup>90</sup>

That wasn't the only time he used children to illustrate a point. In Mark 10, he reprimanded the disciples for trying to keep the children away from him. As he took the children in his arms, he emphasized the need to become like children to enter his Kingdom.

During the week leading up to his crucifixion, there were several instances when Jesus allowed himself to become the visual. In order to help his followers absorb an important truth, he dramatized in eye-catching fashion the point he was wanting to make.

On Palm Sunday, John relates the story of Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt" (John 12:12-15).

This visualization of his kingship was so potent that Matthew tells us "the whole city was stirred" (Matt 21:10). Upon arriving in Jerusalem in this spectacular fashion, Jesus then proceeded to the temple where he demonstrated both his passion for God and his authority to defend God's honour by physically forcing out those who had turned the area into a dishonest business district (Matt 21:12-13). Then, on the Thursday night, after he had eaten with his disciples, he took a towel and water and washed the feet of each disciple. When he finished, he said to them, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have

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<sup>90</sup> Zuck, *Teaching*, 176-177.



washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:14-15). Through his actions and words, he had not only told them about humility, he had also shown them.<sup>91</sup>

Three days after being tortured and cruelly executed on a Roman cross, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his followers. At that critical moment for those men and women whose world had just been shaken to the core over the loss of their master, Jesus didn't simply stand and talk to them. Luke 24:36-42 demonstrates the vitally important role that the visual played at that appearance:

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

For one last time, Jesus allowed himself to be the visual. Jesus didn't do this reluctantly or with resignation. He was happy to do it. The disciples needed to *see* that he was indeed alive again. Jesus knew this and provided their eyes with the confirmation that was necessary. And the rest is history. The Church exists today in the shadow of the disciples' unwavering conviction that Jesus had indeed risen.

Another way in which Jesus used visuals in his teaching was through the use of what might be called "nature" miracles, that is, miracles not involving people's health. He did not perform the miracles to show off or attract a crowd. He did not do them for his own or anyone else's entertainment. He refused to do them on demand and usually

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<sup>91</sup> Zuck, *Teaching*, 177.

they were totally unexpected by the people. The best way to understand his nature miracles, in Regier's words, is that "even His miracles offered a visual proof of His message."<sup>92</sup> In other words, he used the visual aspect of these miracles to give credibility to himself and his message.

Both at the beginning (Luke 5:4) and at the end of his ministry (John 21:6), Jesus gives supernatural guidance to Peter and his associates on where to drop their fishing nets, each time resulting in a record catch. One time Jesus fed 5000 men plus women and children with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt 14:13-21). On another occasion, he did a similar miracle with 4000 men plus women and children (Matt 15:29-39). Twice, the gospel writers relate miracles of Jesus during a storm on the Sea of Galilee. In the first incident, Jesus calmed the storm with his words (Mark 4:39). The second time, Jesus came walking on the water toward the disciples' boat and even empowered Peter to do likewise for a brief time (Matt 14:25-31). While these events were all quite distinct from one another, they do have something in common. As Zuck puts it, "Jesus' many miracles were dynamic visual demonstrations to the crowds, his disciples, and the religious leaders of his power, authority, compassion, and deity."<sup>93</sup>

A similar goal seems to have been in mind when Jesus cast out demons. In the first chapter of Mark, the story is told of how Jesus cast a demon out of a man in the synagogue in Capernaum. The reaction of the people points toward the strength of this visual authentication of Jesus' ministry:

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee (Mark 1:27).

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<sup>92</sup> Regier, "Audiovisual Support," 198.

<sup>93</sup> Zuck, *Teaching*, 178.

Though less obvious, a similar theme seems to have been present when Jesus casts demons out of a boy (Mark 9:16-27) and the man from Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20).

However, the most common miracles done by Jesus were the healings performed by him on scores of sick, disabled and even dead people. Whitney, who is keen to emphasize verbal preaching (while downplaying the use of visual elements), states, “In the New Testament, Jesus preached (Matt 4:17; Luke 4:43–44)....Then Jesus sent out the apostles to preach (Matt 10:7; Acts 10:42).”<sup>94</sup> But this viewpoint totally overlooks the numerous descriptions of Jesus’ ministry which included the aspects of teaching, preaching and healing, such as in Matt 4:23 and 9:35. And Whitney’s use of Matt 10:7 to explain the disciples’ ministry only includes half of the job description given to them by Jesus. Verse 8 goes on to say, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.” Clearly healing was not just on the periphery of Jesus’ ministry. It was a vital part of what he did.

What was the reason behind the healings? Were they motivated by compassion? Certainly they were. It is plainly stated in different passages that Jesus’ heart was moved by the suffering he saw. But if that was the sole reason for the healings, Jesus could have instantly cured all the sick people (or all the sick people with faith) in Israel in a single moment. But he didn’t do that. The primary purpose of the healings appears to be providing a visual element to his teaching by confirming his authority or demonstrating a particular truth he was teaching.

A good example of this is found in the story when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. Luke recalls the story in chapter 6, when a man with a shriveled hand was

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<sup>94</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, location 1040-1045, Kindle e-book.

viewed cold-heartedly by the religious leaders simply as a good chance to get Jesus into trouble. Regardless, Jesus wanted to teach all those present the true understanding of the Sabbath day. But he not only heals the man to prove his point. Before he does so, he actually commands the man “Get up and stand in front of everyone” (Luke 6:8). There was no way for the people present to miss that potent visual message.

To witness a healing was a powerful visual. But Olcott points out that, at times, Jesus chose to increase the visuals to a still higher level. “Even in healing the blind man (John 9:6) Jesus used visual effects to communicate when he spit in the dirt and placed the mud on the blind man’s eyes.”<sup>95</sup> With a different blind man, Jesus used just his saliva on the eyes when he performed the healing (Mark 8:22ff).

Another important visual aspect of Jesus healing ministry was his use of physical touch. Based on several accounts of long-distance healing, it can be concluded that Jesus did not need to be in physical contact with sick people in order to heal them. In Matthew 8, Jesus heals a centurion’s servant without him present. The same is true when Jesus heals a Canaanite woman’s daughter (Matt 15) and a royal official’s son (John 4). If that is the case, there must have been a different reason why Jesus so often used touch when he healed people. The most basic answer would seem to be that he wanted to provide a visual cue for people so that they knew for certain that the healing was coming from him alone. Webb Garrison captures this concept with these words: “Our Saviour helped make His message real by laying His hand upon the sick and crippled so that they might be visible illustrations of the changes wrought by acceptance of His sensational sermons.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Olcott, “Use of Multimedia,” 26.

<sup>96</sup> Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1954), 245.

The examples of Jesus' ministry of touch are many and varied. Luke 5 contains the report of a leper who was healed after Jesus put his hand on him. Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever until Jesus took hold of her hand (Matt 8:15). On a couple of occasions, Jesus gave sight to blind men by placing his fingers on their eyes (Matt 9:29 and 20:34). In the seventh chapter of Mark, the story is told of Jesus performing a miracle on a deaf and mute man by sticking his fingers in his ears and some of his saliva on the man's tongue. A stooped and crippled woman was able to straighten up for the first time in eighteen years after Jesus placed his hands on her (Luke 13:10-13). In Luke 14, there is an account of Jesus healing a man with dropsy by touching him. In fact, this practice was so common, that Luke says, "When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them" (Luke 4:40).

The ultimate form of healing was when Jesus raised someone back to life. Like the other types of healing, this miracle did not require Jesus to have physical contact with the victim in order to restore life to the body. This was seen in the raising of Lazarus (John 11:43-44). Yet, in Luke 7:14-15, Jesus brought a young man back to life by touching the side of the coffin being carried by others. And, similarly, when he went to help Jairus' daughter, he made the point of taking her hand when he spoke to her to bring her back to life (Luke 8:51-54).

It has been seen, then, that visuals were a vital part of Jesus' ministry. In his teaching, it was not uncommon for him to make use of physical objects to help make his point understood and memorable. He utilized people and their actions as well to provide visual demonstrations of what he was speaking about. He even would dramatize truths,

making himself the visual element of the lesson. Miracles, which were also an important part of his ministry, appear to be used primarily to allow the truth he was teaching not only to be heard but also seen, usually in dramatic fashion. This included the miracles of healing he performed for the demon possessed, the sick and even the dead. These demonstrations of Jesus' love and power were often made even more visual by his use of touch in the healing process.

The discussion regarding Jesus' miracles may cause some to ask what it has to do with this issue of modern preachers using visuals. It is true that it would be a rare sermon today which would employ a miracle in the middle of it. However, what needs to be kept in mind is that the purpose of Jesus' miracles and the purpose of visuals used by today's preachers are the same—to support the message of the Good News. As Frank Graves phrased it almost 100 years ago, “Such illustrations of [Jesus'] teaching through gestures and external acts of necessity form part of the method of all successful teaching.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, if Jesus was such a keen user of visuals, how can a preacher of God's Word possibly ignore his example?

Perhaps it would be fitting to summarize Jesus' understanding of visuals with a couple of passages in which sight and hearing are shown to be most effective when in partnership with each other. When John the Baptist was in prison, wrestling with doubt, he sent some followers to Jesus to find out for certain if Jesus was the expected Messiah. Luke 7:22 recalls Jesus' response: “So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached

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<sup>97</sup> Frank P. Graves, *What Did Jesus Teach?* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 70.

to the poor.”” The proof which Jesus believed would satisfy John was in what his followers had both *seen and heard* about the Lord. At another time, when Jesus was celebrating with his disciples after their return from a successful mission tour, he wanted to impress upon them the significance of what they had just experienced. In Luke’s words, “Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it’” (Luke 10:23-24). The things that they were *seeing and hearing* were so spiritually important, that those who had come before them had longed to have those same experiences. Similarly, for the modern communicator of God’s Word, the use of physical objects while preaching gives the audience the opportunity both to *see and hear* the truth of Scripture.

### 3. Other People’s Use of Visuals in the New Testament

While Jesus provides the primary example of teaching in the New Testament, it should be noted that there are limited records of the teaching and preaching of others as well. As the one “preparing the way for the Lord,” John the Baptist gained his name through the visual demonstration that stood at the center of his message of repentance. Those who responded to his message by confessing their sins were then called upon to dramatize outwardly what had just taken place within them. “Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River” (Matt 3:6). Each time this happened, it became a powerful lesson in the eyes of those who witnessed it. In many denominations today, baptism is understood to be a visual re-enactment of Christ’s saving work, based on Rom 6:3-4. Blackwood states it this way: “The ordinance of baptism paints a visual

picture of a theological reality. We even remind our congregations that baptism is a *picture* of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.”<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the practice of baptizing people in the Jordan River, John was known to use other visuals in his preaching. In Matt 3:8-9, John declared to those gathered around, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of *these* stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (emphasis added). It is easy to picture this wild-looking character standing on the river bank and holding high one of the stones which lay at his feet as he makes this bold statement. Some authors feel that even his outfit of camel hair was a visual technique used by this prophet. As Garrison says, “If vivid and unconventional methods make preaching worthless some very familiar names must head the list of homiletical failures....John the Baptist affected a striking costume that must have been criticized by many a suave Levite.”<sup>99</sup>

After Jesus had ascended back to heaven, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, became a dynamic preacher. Following the example of his Master, he learned to utilize the visual power of miracles to give greater impact to his message about the resurrected Saviour. After Peter and John healed a crippled beggar on the temple grounds, Luke described what followed: “While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: ‘Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?’” (Acts 3:11-12). Both what people saw and what they heard pointed them toward Jesus.

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<sup>98</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 78.

<sup>99</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 245.



The apostle Paul followed a similar pattern. When he and Barnabas set out on the very first missionary journey, they began by travelling to the island of Cyprus. In Paphos, as they began to share the Gospel with the proconsul, a false prophet tried to thwart their efforts. Luke depicts the scene like this:

But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord (Acts 13:8-12).

Based on all that we know of Paul’s evangelistic methods, it is unlikely that his response to the sorcerer was simply exasperated desperation. It seems much more probable that this was a strategic decision on his part to show the proconsul what he had just been speaking about. This is verified in v. 12 which emphasizes the proconsul’s conversion based on what he “saw” and the “teaching” he had heard. Once again, the New Testament message is consistent. The verbal message about Christ is central, but it is strongly assisted through the use of visuals.

#### 4. The Importance of Sight for Jesus’ Witnesses

An examination of the New Testament also reveals that the very credibility of the Gospel record rested, in large part, upon what had been personally seen by people. Luke begins his first volume by establishing the reliability of what he had written through his use of eyewitness material: “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things

that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Luke 1:1-2). The significance of this claim is pointed out by Robert Stein, who says, “Luke clearly states that during this period of oral tradition it was the eyewitnesses who passed on the gospel traditions, thus witnessing to what they had seen with their own eyes, heard, and handled concerning the Word of Life.”<sup>100</sup>

This theme carries through into Luke’s second volume, as he records the events from the early days of the Church. He begins the book of Acts with the same emphasis on witnesses in order to prove the truth of the accounts which were to follow. In Acts 1:3 it says, “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”

In the stories which follow, the importance of what had been seen often emerges. Even before the Day of Pentecost takes place, the believers gathered for a crucial decision, one which hinged on this concept of eyewitness testimony. As Stein states, “The early Church greatly esteemed and valued the testimony of the eyewitnesses. The first official act of the Church was to select a replacement among the Twelve for Judas, with the one condition that the individual be an eyewitness of Jesus’ life from His baptism to His resurrection (Acts 1:21f.).”<sup>101</sup> Soon after that, when Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, they defended their actions of healing in Jesus’ name by saying, “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Later, in chapter 10, Peter shared with Cornelius some of what he had “seen and heard,” saying,

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<sup>100</sup> Robert H. Stein, “Eyewitness,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:250.

<sup>101</sup> Stein, “Eyewitness,” 250.

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:39-41).

Luke also recorded similar words of Paul in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch:

“For many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people” (Acts 13:31). This was an important issue for Paul. Even though Jesus returned to heaven, Paul would later have his own personal encounter with the risen Lord. This formed the basis of his authority as an apostle. As Wilhelm Mundle says, “From [Christ, Paul] received his apostolic commission (Rom. 1:5), which is grounded in the fact that he has seen the resurrected Lord (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Thereby he belongs to the circle of Easter witnesses and apostles (1 Cor. 15:11). This ‘seeing’ is understood by him to be an event of revelation; it pleased God to reveal his Son to him.”<sup>102</sup>

John also understood the critical role that the visual played in creating trust in the message of the Good News. At the beginning of his gospel, he declared, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The beloved disciple wanted to assure his readers that he was talking about things which he himself had seen. Again, when his account reached the climax of Jesus’ crucifixion and death, he laid claim once more to being an eyewitness of what he was telling the readers. In John 19:35, it says, “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.”

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<sup>102</sup> Wilhelm Mundle, “ἀποκαλύπτω,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:314.

When John wrote his first letter, he began with what Blackwood refers to as the “three primary senses [that] interface with teaching: hearing, seeing and touching.”<sup>103</sup> John said, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). His eyewitness status was affirmed again later in the letter in 4:14.

Peter, in his first letter, identified himself as “a witness of Christ’s sufferings” in order to give weight to his words as an apostle (1 Pet 5:1). In 2 Peter, he reassured his readers that his words could be trusted because his stories were not fictional. They were based on what he had seen with his own eyes. “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet 1:16).

What can be concluded from this emphasis in the New Testament on eyewitness testimony? First, it can be said that the Bible recognizes that people are more likely to believe something if it involves sight. As far as the Gospel record is concerned, it seems that if it was personally seen by people, it could be believed. Second, there seems to be no indication at all that this is displeasing to God. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. From the New Testament documents it appears that God, in knowing how he made humans, chose to use the power of the visual to prove the trustworthiness of the Gospel.

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<sup>103</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 64.

## 5. The Book of Revelation: The Final Vision from God

Interestingly the Bible closes with a book whose very name emphasizes God's visual communication with humankind—Revelation. The author, John the Apostle, relates to his readers the many visions that God had given to him. Writing in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, John described what he saw in his many visions, including: Jesus, rivers, horses and riders, seas, a golden censer, a lamb, lampstands, beasts, trumpets, dragons, bowls and scrolls. God chose to communicate with him in ways which were extremely visual. The things he saw were vivid, unusual, and certainly memorable. As God communicated his final Spirit-breathed message to the human race, he chose to rely heavily on sight to convey his revelation.

In considering the appropriateness of using visual elements while preaching, Blackwood points out that there is an episode in Revelation which is particularly relevant. Chapters 4 and 5 are set in the throne room of heaven where, through John, the readers are given “a view of worship that is done right.”<sup>104</sup> This heavenly worship includes “vivid light, extravagant color, powerful sound, new music, visual communication, interactive participation.”<sup>105</sup> These elements combine in such a powerful way that it is difficult even to imagine it. However it appears that this scene reveals God's heart when it comes to worship. As Blackwood says,

[The purpose of these two chapters] is to exalt the Son of God and to set in motion the events that will lead up to his inauguration as King of kings and Lord of lords. To communicate that theme to all the inhabitants of heaven, God unleashes a multisensory extravaganza. The teaching is presented in forms that are verbal, visual, and interactive. To say there is a *wow factor* in heaven's worship is stating it mildly. God aims for multisensory teaching and *big* worship!<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 127.

<sup>105</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 127.

<sup>106</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 127.

This is significant since it would seem logical that God would desire the worship of his followers here on earth to mirror what happens in heaven. And clearly that worship and teaching celebrated the visual along with the verbal.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Today's world of communication is now a visual world, both in terms of how people experience life as well as in new understandings of the means by which humans learn. In a way, it could be said that the Church drifted away from the multisensory method of communicating found throughout the Bible but now has the opportunity to regain that powerful approach to sharing God's message to the world. How should today's preachers respond to this shifting reality? A careful examination of Scripture reveals several clear principles which can be a guide to those who have been called by God to communicate his word to those who live in this visual world.

The first biblical principle is that God has expressly prohibited any attempt to render him in a visual form. To do so is unmistakably declared to be sin. It is also sin to give worship or allegiance to any other image of a god. This is labelled as idolatry. Secondly, Scripture reveals that in God's revelation to humankind, primacy has been given to the spoken and written word. This is true in both the Old and the New Testaments, giving an unusual word-based religious feature to the Judeo-Christian belief system.

However, throughout the pages of the Bible, God's "word" message was supported, illuminated and empowered by means of the "visual" message. God's revelation to people was multisensory both in nature as well as in his teaching and

actions. This was made most explicit in the Incarnation. As Lara says, “Word and image go hand in hand, and for those of us who stand in the Christian tradition, scripture and picture are necessarily complementary. The ‘Word became flesh’ implies not only that it became audible, but that it also became visible. The Word became image.”<sup>107</sup>

The Bible says that Jesus personally embodied the image of his Father. The importance of the sense of sight was also evident in his teaching. He readily employed all manner of visuals—objects, people, miracles, healings, exorcisms—in order to make his words even more powerful and effective.

The Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles followed the patterns set down by the Lord when it came to using visuals. They used objects, miracles, drama and even actual events in their own lives to demonstrate for the eyes what was being proclaimed for the ears of their audience. Often, in the Old Testament, this was being done at God’s express command.

When considering the sense of sight in relation to the Bible, it must be remembered that the reliability of the New Testament documents rests firmly on the eyewitness accounts of the followers of Jesus. The reason these people can be believed is because they saw the events with their own eyes. This “trust-because-it’s-seen” approach was not only allowed by God, but was even encouraged, in order to make it possible for people to accept as true what had happened.

From the Lord’s appearances in Genesis to the heavenly worship depicted in Revelation, the biblical message is consistent. The verbal communication of God’s message is central, but it is often accompanied by visual elements. These were used to

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<sup>107</sup> Lara, “Visual Preaching,” 267.

gain people's attention, give greater clarity, and imprint it in the memories of those who experienced it.

How then does the Bible speak into the issue of the use of visual objects in sermons by modern-day preachers? Based on these biblical principles and examples, it can be concluded that the Bible does not forbid such a practice, or, to frame it in a positive way, the Bible *allows* the use of visual objects when preaching. Steven Mathewson puts it simply when he states, "there's no theological reason to avoid them."<sup>108</sup> To those who disagree, stating that, according to the Bible, visuals have no place in a sermon, Blackwood responds, "We have permission to use multisensory preaching....Do not make it a biblical-theological issue. There is theological precedence for those who wish to make use of its effect."<sup>109</sup> Chapell makes an even stronger conclusion. Since "the Bible enhances propositional statements with experiential data, identifiable examples, and memorable images," he challenges people with these words: "Now the question is whether sermons that ignore the structure of Scripture are truly on the same path as their inspired guide. Is only the content of Scripture normative, or is not the form of Scripture itself instructive?"<sup>110</sup> In fact, even though it is not explicitly stated, it can be argued that the use of visuals when communicating God's message is *encouraged*, maybe even *expected*, in order to ensure, as much as possible, that the truth is heard, understood, and applied. Such a practice would be following in the pattern established by the Lord himself as well as those people in the pages of Scripture who spoke on his behalf.

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<sup>108</sup> Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 154.

<sup>109</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 78.

<sup>110</sup> Chapell, *Using Illustrations*, location 394-396.



However, even if the Bible does not prohibit the use of objects while preaching, is it possible that there are other reasons that would prevent such a practice? Are there additional factors which could influence the choice of a preacher whether or not to adopt this approach? The following chapter will seek to address these questions as well as provide some practical guidance surrounding this issue.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WHY AND HOW PHYSICAL OBJECTS SHOULD BE USED

In-depth research into homiletical literature regarding the subject of preaching with visual objects reveals an amazing lack of material. While a vast amount has been written over the years to give guidance and advice to those who wish to preach well, very little has been said regarding this particular methodology. Nevertheless, by drawing from a wide range of sources, a picture begins to form around this important homiletical subject. In this chapter, the question of the appropriateness of objects in sermons will be carefully explored. In addition, various approaches to the use of visual objects will be looked at as well as helpful principles for selecting and utilizing such objects effectively.

#### A. DEFINITION OF TERMS

What is the best term or phrase to utilize when referring to an object which is used by a preacher in the context of a sermon? Several different words have been employed by various authors. However some names lack precision which can lead to misunderstanding. Other expressions carry connotations which can prove a hindrance to their use or acceptance. One of the most common descriptions is *visual aid*. For example, John Baird specifies that a visual aid must be “separate from the speaker.” That means, in his view, that “a gesture to indicate the size of an object being discussed would not be a visual aid....The actual object, held up for inspection, would be a visual aid.”<sup>1</sup> However, since the words *visual aid* imply something visible which provides help, it is

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Baird, *Preparing for Platform and Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 117.

not surprising that some people have a much more inclusive understanding of the same phrase. In Stott's perspective, drama, dance and dialogue would be considered *visual aids*. He goes even further when he says "[God] means the pastor to be a visual aid to the congregation."<sup>2</sup> This is far from the concept of a physical object referred to or held by the preacher. Additionally, in many of today's churches, it is common to use multimedia in the context of worship. As a result, current homiletical literature usually utilizes *visual aid* to describe the use of electronic tools within sermons such as PowerPoint or video clips from movies. It would therefore appear that the phrase *visual aid* lacks sufficient precision to describe the subject of this thesis.

Another commonly employed term is *prop*. This word is usually associated with drama and theatre where it is viewed in a positive way. While discussing first-person narrative sermons, Haddon and Torrey Robinson explain, "'Props' is short for properties and refers to the moveable articles on the platform, which are used to aid your presentation."<sup>3</sup> This would suggest that *prop* might be a more suitable term to refer to the objects included in a sermon. However, *prop* has another definition. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, a *prop* is "a person or thing that is a major source of support or assistance" frequently with the underlying implication that, without that support, the person or thing would otherwise fail or decline.<sup>4</sup> Thus a sermon which includes props could be seen by some as weak and needing some type of gimmick to hold it up. Therefore, due to this possible negative connotation, it would seem best to avoid the name *prop* when describing objects used in sermons.

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<sup>2</sup> John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 67.

<sup>4</sup> Oxford Dictionary of English, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "prop," Kindle e-book.

The description *illustration* is an accurate one. In Leslie Flynn's words, "To *illustrate*, according to the etymology of the word, is to throw luster or light on a topic."<sup>5</sup> That is a fitting portrayal of the role of the objects used by the preacher. Nevertheless, the term fails since, like the phrase *visual aid*, it is not precise enough to be helpful. Most *illustrations* used by preachers are verbal in nature.

For many people, the idea of a preacher using a physical item in the sermon calls to mind the words *object lesson*. The weakness of this name is seen in the comment from John Broadus: "The object lesson sermon...is most frequently used in children's sermons."<sup>6</sup> Even though adults enjoy children's sermons as much, or more, than the children, it is easy for someone to dismiss the depth or seriousness of an "adult" sermon which employs an *object lesson*, since, in the words of Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, "through the years, object lessons have been relegated almost exclusively to children's sermons."<sup>7</sup>

As a result, it would seem most effective for this thesis simply to use the phrase *physical object* or *object* when describing the visual item used by the preacher in the sermon. This will distinguish it from high tech visual tools as well as physical gestures by the one preaching. Such a name does not limit the size of the item since the physical object could be small enough to sit in the hand or large enough to be part of the set-up of the platform. At the same time, *physical object* implies something which can be seen.

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<sup>5</sup> Leslie B. Flynn, *Come Alive with Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 24.

<sup>6</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 302.

<sup>7</sup> Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 333-334.

## B. ISSUES SURROUNDING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE USE OF OBJECTS IN SERMONS

In the previous chapter, a thorough examination of the Bible indicated that there is little scriptural basis for rejecting the use of physical objects while preaching. However, it is important that an investigation also be made to discover if there are other reasons which might cause the preacher either to reject or adopt this practice. The various concerns which are raised can be grouped into six distinct issues.

### 1. Is it appropriate for Christian teaching?

The significance of the great shift that has taken place in the way in which people process and understand the world is enormous. Hunt captures the extent of this change when he says, “If the printing press was capable of propelling Europe out of the Middle Ages and into a modern one, why should we think it strange that a new communication medium is not also capable of changing the information environment and our way of seeing the world?”<sup>8</sup> What is the “new communication medium” to which he refers? He is speaking of the way in which people learn about the world through pictures. In his opinion, “The image has replaced modernism’s dependency on the written word....The proliferation of images is not the *sole* force that is pushing us out of the modern era, but I would suggest that it is a *major* factor in the shift.”<sup>9</sup>

This, then, is the transformation which is being faced by the Church, and especially the preacher. Stott recognizes the change which has taken place. He says:

When they are accustomed to the swiftly moving images of the screen, how can we expect them to give their attention to one person talking, with no frills, no light relief and nothing else to look at?...I do not think this is

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur W. Hunt, *The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 107.

<sup>9</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 189.

reason enough to give up preaching, for...there is something unique and irreplaceable about it. But we shall certainly have to fight for people's attention.<sup>10</sup>

For those who have been called to proclaim God's Word, the crux of the challenge is captured by Eric Reed: "For preachers, whose craft and trade is words both spoken and written, the question is: How then shall we communicate?"<sup>11</sup>

In the face of this revolution, it is clear that the Church must decide how to respond. According to a survey conducted by the journal *Leadership* in 2007, most pastors "have entered the visual fray—some signed on willingly, others feel conscripted—but almost all have felt the ground shift beneath their pulpits."<sup>12</sup> In the survey, 73% of churches use visuals in some way in their services, with "props" being adopted by about one-third (34%) of them.<sup>13</sup> However, even if three quarters of North American churches have moved in that direction, it must be acknowledged that this is not an issue that is decided simply by majority opinion. A careful reflection is required to determine if using physical objects while preaching is the right response to society's shift toward the visual. Bryan Chapell frames the issue this way: "Some believe these trends result from modern culture's audiovisual addictions....Whether these trends are actually a result of recent cultural developments or are the exploitation of more basic human thought processes remains a question."<sup>14</sup>

There are some who consider society's growing emphasis on the visual to be much more dangerous than most people realize. Hunt raises the alarm, claiming that "we

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<sup>10</sup> Stott, *Two Worlds*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Reed, "Preaching by Faith and by Sight: How Oral Communicators are Joining the Visual Revolution," *Leadership* 28, no 3 (Summer 2007): 25.

<sup>12</sup> Reed, "Preaching by Faith," 25.

<sup>13</sup> Reed, "Preaching by Faith," 25.

<sup>14</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), location 486-489, Kindle e-book.

are all in danger of becoming pagans. Not *just* pagans, but mindless and defenceless pagans.”<sup>15</sup> In the opinion of Vibert, “the visual emphasis which is intrinsic to the very media is in fact idolatrous.”<sup>16</sup> Their claim is that images are not amoral or value-neutral. It is believed that they actually push people away from the Gospel message. For those who hold to this understanding, it is clear that the Church must resist the urge to join in with the wider culture in elevating the visual. Byron Snapp warns, “It is difficult to communicate a word-based religion to an image-oriented society. Alarming, rather than leading culture, the church has succumbed to this trend.”<sup>17</sup>

So what is the Church to do? Does the modern emphasis on image have inherent dangers? Perhaps it does. Is it difficult for the Church to change its pattern and begin to use visuals in ways which demonstrate quality and intentionality? No doubt it is. However, are those reasons strong enough to allow preachers to ignore the use of visuals in the context of sermons? The words of Andy Stanley and Lane Jones may be helpful in maintaining some perspective: “Jesus wasn’t content with being right. He was committed to being heard. So how can those of us who feel called to leverage His words to impact our generation be content with anything less?”<sup>18</sup> Is today’s Church committed to being heard? Before dismissing visuals too quickly as inappropriate for Christian teaching, it would be wise to consider other alternatives.

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<sup>15</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Vibert, “The Word In An Audio-Visual Age: Can We Still Preach The Gospel?” *Churchman* 106, no 2 (1992): 151.

<sup>17</sup> Byron Snapp, “A Review of The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World,” Chalcedon Foundation, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://chalcedon.edu/research/articles/a-review-of-the-vanishing-word-the-veneration-of-visual-imagery-in-the-postmodern-world/>.

<sup>18</sup> Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006), Kobo e-book, chap. 14, 11.

This is, of course, not a new issue for the Church. Throughout its history, there have been different opinions and approaches when it comes to the use of visuals to help communicate God's Word. There have been periods which were marked by the tendency to elevate visual communication, sometimes even higher than the spoken word. During the Middle Ages, Jensen points out, even the church buildings themselves were "distinguished by their visual orientation. The visual sense, so to speak, dominated the auditory sense."<sup>19</sup> Much beautiful art and architecture exists today due to this strong drive to express God's truth through the sense of sight. As noted by Robert G. Clouse, "Medieval artistic achievement reached its height in the Gothic cathedral....Theology was reflected in the structure of the building; the upward striving towards God; the cross-shape; and the altar situated in the east, facing Jerusalem. Every detail of the creed—from the Trinity to the creation, and from the passion of the Christ to the Last Judgement—appeared in sculpture and stained glass."<sup>20</sup>

It must also be recognized, however, that there have been times when iconoclasts sought to rid the Church of virtually all images. These strong movements in the eighth and ninth centuries were motivated by the belief that "visual images can become idols and, therefore, they should not be a part of the church's worship life."<sup>21</sup> The same thing happened during the Reformation. The context was an unhealthy one-sidedness of the senses which had developed in the teaching practices of the Church. According to Jensen:

On the eve of the Reformation there was a great imbalance of the visual and auditory in the church's life. The visual sense was dominant....The

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<sup>19</sup> Richard A. Jensen, "Thinking in Picture," *Dialog*, 43, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 298.

<sup>20</sup> Richard G. Clouse, "Flowering: The Western Church," in *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 293.

<sup>21</sup> Richard A. Jensen, "Preaching in a New Communication Environment," *Clergy Journal* 80, no.1 (October 2003): 5.



auditory sense was diminished....The problem with that [is that]...art could and did lead to much superstition and idolatry.<sup>22</sup>

This imbalance resulted in a reaction (or perhaps overreaction) by the Reformers. The extreme response within the new Protestant churches is described by Samuel Miller:

Religion in its own way turned its back on eyework. Symbolism was reduced to a minimum, eliminating every vestige of art from the sanctuary. The centering of worship in the Bible, in sermons, in devotional reading, in catechetical instruction turned the Church into a listening shell—an auditorium. The tongue came into undisputed sway and raged with fury and inexhaustible garrulity. It seemed so much more sophisticated, so much more rational, than the eyework of the medieval faith. The work of the eye became negligible.<sup>23</sup>

This reaction of the Reformers was so radical and powerful that its effect is still being felt in Protestant churches today. From Jensen's perspective, "It is out of this context that a strong accent on the 'Word' accompanied much of Reformation Christianity into its future!...This dominance of the Word has made the use of visual images in preaching highly problematic for some."<sup>24</sup>

However, in looking back through the history of the Church, Jensen sees an overall positive approach to the visual. He states, "Thinking in picture as a way of preaching is grounded in the history of the use of art in the church's life. Visualizing the Word of God is an ancient discipline in the life of the church."<sup>25</sup> There are many examples of famous preachers who made valuable use of physical objects when they spoke.

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<sup>22</sup> Jensen, "Thinking," 298.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel H. Miller, "The Vision of Reality and Art," in *Preaching with Purpose & Power*, ed. Don M. Aycock (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1982), 237-238.

<sup>24</sup> Jensen, "Thinking," 299.

<sup>25</sup> Jensen, "Thinking," 303.

In the second half of the fifth century, Saint Patrick held up the shamrock when he sought to explain the Trinity to the pagan Irish.<sup>26</sup> In the eighth century, a debate raged within the Church over the use of visuals in the context of worship. Jensen tells how “St. John of Damascus (AD 676-749) championed the use of images....The iconoclasts were defeated.”<sup>27</sup> A few hundred years later, it apparently wasn’t unusual for Saint Francis of Assisi (AD 1182-1226), the founder of the Franciscan Order, to include physical objects in his preaching and teaching. Lara describes a sermon of Francis’ when he arranged the world’s first Christmas *crèche* with live animals. “Francis himself acted as midwife to an invisible Virgin Mary and ‘delivered’ a real baby boy whom he placed in the manger.”<sup>28</sup> Bernadine of Siena (1380-1444) was known to utilize nearby sculptures and architecture while preaching to his outdoor audience. It is also recorded how one time, in Piazza del Campo, “he created a placard with a sky-blue field against which he painted the monogram of the Holy Name of Jesus set within the golden rays of a sunburst.”<sup>29</sup>

Many years later, John Wesley (1703-1791), who helped found Methodism and the Holiness Movement, stood atop his father’s own tomb as a potent visual during a sermon in his hometown.<sup>30</sup> One of Wesley’s contemporaries, George Whitefield (1714-1770), also chose to include physical objects in his sermons. In his memoir about Whitefield, John Gillies related how that powerful preacher would wear a judge’s black condemning cap:

I have known him to avail himself of it in the close of a sermon; with his eyes full of tears, and his heart almost too big to admit speech, dropping

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<sup>26</sup> Jaime Lara, “Visual Preaching: The Witness of Our Latin Eyes,” *Chicago Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 271.

<sup>27</sup> Jensen, “Preaching,” 6.

<sup>28</sup> Lara, “Visual Preaching,” 271. See also Thomas of Celano *Vita* I 30.84.

<sup>29</sup> Lara, “Visual Preaching,” 273.

<sup>30</sup> Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1954), 245.

into a momentary pause—"I am going now to put on my condemning-cap: sinner, I must do it: I must pronounce sentence upon you"—and then in a tremendous strain of eloquence, recite our Lord's words, "Go ye cursed," not without a very powerful description of the nature of the curse.<sup>31</sup>

There are other stories of Whitefield preaching from tombs, beside road signs and even gallows.<sup>32</sup> Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), once "displayed the chains that had bound abolition militant John Brown and stomped on them for symbolic effect."<sup>33</sup>

The preachers who have been mentioned were not unknown individuals who existed on the periphery of the Church. They were widely known, highly influential preachers. In selecting their methodology, they understood the impact of using physical objects as part of their sermons. As today's preachers wrestle with the appropriateness of visuals in Christian teaching, history provides many examples which would indicate the effectiveness of such an approach. In Jensen's evaluation, "Visualizing the Word of God...can help us reach out to people today....Thinking in picture is an important aspect of preaching as we seek to preach the gospel in our highly visual culture."<sup>34</sup>

Many theologians go even further. In their view, not only is the inclusion of visuals acceptable and valuable, it is also absolutely necessary. If preachers fail to respond to the cultural shift before them, it will result in catastrophe for the Church, according to Graham Johnston.<sup>35</sup> The Church stands at a critical point. Rick Chromey warns: "If we don't learn to communicate with postmodern culture, the death of the

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<sup>31</sup> John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of the Late Rev. George Whitefield*, ed. Aaron C. Seymour (Philadelphia: Simon Probasco, 1820), 287.

<sup>32</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 245.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Graham, "Come, All Ye Faithful: America's First Megachurch and Its Celebrity Pastor," accessed Feb 8, 2013, <http://www.thedaily.com/page/2011/10/25/102511-opinions-history-megachurch-graham-1-3/>.

<sup>34</sup> Jensen, "Thinking," 303.

<sup>35</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 163.

modern church—including the sermon—will be hastened. No church is immune.

Reinvent or die. There is no plan B.”<sup>36</sup> In the end, Calvin Miller summarizes this view with the question: “Can the church become pictorially video in order to live, or will it remain only audio and die?”<sup>37</sup>

Is there a way for a preacher to use physical objects, walking the fine line between the dangers of visuals on one hand and the threat of incomprehensibility and irrelevancy with the culture on the other, between “contextualization” and “compromise?” Referencing the Incarnation and verses such as 1 Cor 9:19-22, Os Guinness explains that “the Christian faith is unrivaled among the world religions for its genius in innovation and adaptation. And no branch of the Christian faith has demonstrated this genius more often and more successfully than the evangelical movement.”<sup>38</sup> At the same time, he points out that “the darker side of this innovative genius is the church’s proneness to compromise with the spirit of its age....Carelessly handled, innovation and adaptation become a form of corruption, capitulation, and idolatry.”<sup>39</sup>

There appears to be no easy answer. Brooks puts it simply: “As always, the culture of the age needs to be both used and challenged.”<sup>40</sup> If the Church refuses to communicate God’s Word in a way which engages with the culture, it is not fulfilling its God-given mandate. However, if it adopts any of the patterns of the culture which alter its core message, it ends up preaching a “different gospel, which is really no gospel at all” (Gal 1:6-7). This tension is captured by Lesslie Newbigin:

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<sup>36</sup> Rick Chromey, *Sermons Reimagined: Preaching to a Fluid Culture* (Loveland, Colorado: Group, 2015), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where It Belongs* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 39.

<sup>38</sup> Os Guinness, “Sounding Out the Idols of Church Growth,” in *No God But God*, ed. Os Guinness and John Seel (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 154.

<sup>39</sup> Guinness, “Sounding Out,” 154, 157.

<sup>40</sup> R. T. Brooks, “Preaching in an Audio-Visual Age,” *Baptist Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1981): 123.

[The Christian message] can fail by failing to understand and take seriously the world in which it is set, so that the gospel is not heard but remains incomprehensible because the Church has sought security in its own past instead of risking its life in a deep involvement with the world. It can fail, on the other hand, by allowing the world to dictate the issues and the terms of the meeting. The result then is that the world is not challenged at its depth but rather absorbs and domesticates the gospel and uses it to sacralise its own purposes.<sup>41</sup>

Is the use of physical objects while preaching appropriate for Christian teaching?

The answer is “yes.” Down through the history of the Church, there is a strong—though not unanimous—message that a full view of Scripture validates and even encourages an approach to proclaiming God’s truth in a way which includes visuals. However wisdom and care are needed in order to avoid the danger of compromising the very message which the Church is being called to proclaim.

## 2. Is it appropriate for teaching adults?

Even if it is concluded that using physical objects as part of a sermon is not contrary to the Gospel, it still does not mean that it is the best way to help adults learn. Blackwood points out, “Many view such strategies as acceptable for youth, but they see them as unacceptable for teaching in an adult context, especially in worship.”<sup>42</sup> One who holds to this view is Cinda Gorman who claims that “such techniques are more appropriate for the classroom.”<sup>43</sup> While teaching takes place in both the classroom and the sanctuary, it is felt that the use of such visuals during a sermon goes contrary to the dignity that must be guarded in a worship service. Writing about first-person narrative sermons, Stephen

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<sup>41</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 152.

<sup>42</sup> Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 32.

<sup>43</sup> Cinda Gorman, “Preaching for the Senses,” *Leadership* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 116.

Garner discourages the use of costumes and objects. He says, “I do not believe worship should resemble your local community theatre, with tired costumes and questionable prop choices.”<sup>44</sup> George Sweazey expresses his wariness of the preacher’s use of physical objects when he says, “A sermon is a part of a worship service, and devices that might be useful for a classroom could destroy the sense of the beauty of holiness.”<sup>45</sup>

But is “dignity” God’s greatest concern? Certainly, if one looks at the strict instructions given for all the activities surrounding the tabernacle and temple, God’s holiness is preeminent. However, when God called upon his prophets to communicate to his people, it is clear that “dignity” was not the most important issue. The priority was declaring the message in such a way that it was understood and remembered. In 2 Sam 6:20-23, God provides a glimpse into his perspective on dignity and worship. David’s wife criticised him for the “undignified” manner in which he danced as the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Jerusalem. While God accepted what David offered in worship, God’s displeasure with Michal’s attitude resulted in a lifetime of barrenness.

This elevation of communication over “dignity” can be seen in the preaching styles of various Old Testament prophets. For a period of time, Jeremiah delivered his sermons with a cumbersome yoke around his neck (Jer 27 and 28). In order to dramatize his message, Ezekiel had to eat food cooked over cow manure, only after God relented from his original instruction to cook the food by burning human excrement (Ezek 4:12-15). Isaiah spent three years preaching with no clothes on, in obedience to God’s command.

If the Bible prioritizes communication over dignity, it weakens the position that preaching with physical objects is not appropriate for adults. Vines and Shaddix claim

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen Chapin Garner, *Getting into Character* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 86.

<sup>45</sup> George E. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976),

that “visual aids enhance communication to listeners of every age, from preschoolers to senior adults...and should be used to augment biblical exposition whenever helpful and appropriate.”<sup>46</sup> A 2008 study coming out of the University of California focused on learning through eyes and ears. The authors, Ladan Shams and Aaron R. Seitz, conclude that, even though learning was different between adults and children, “accumulating reports indicate the superiority of bisensory training in adult learners.”<sup>47</sup> Involving the sense of sight while teaching adults is not only acceptable, it is also more effective.

The medieval Church seemed to know this instinctively. During that era, in the words of Samuel Miller, “the Bible was translated into stone and glass; worship was translated into ceremony, vestment, ritual; meaning was translated into color; significance was elaborated in symbols and signs.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the linguistic poverty of the period, a great deal of spiritual truth was still taught through the sense of sight.

One of the more creative examples of preaching with visuals coming out of that period was the illustrated Exultet rolls in southern Italy [see Appendix 1]. Lara explains:

Unlike a scripture scroll which was meant to be unrolled and read horizontally, the text on an Exultet roll was meant to be read vertically while being unfurled upon an ambo or pulpit. These rolls are illuminated with pictures that usually relate to what is being sung in exegetical fashion, but which are upside-down in relation to the written text. Therefore, the rolls were probably meant to be a sort of colorful filmstrip whose images would appear right-side-up to those standing near as the roll was unfurled over the front of the pulpit.<sup>49</sup>

It is easy to imagine the people, young and old, leaning in to see the pictures as the Bible stories were sung by the preacher.

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<sup>46</sup> Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 334.

<sup>47</sup> Ladan Shams and Aaron R. Seitz, “Benefits of Multisensory Learning,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 12, no. 11 (November 2008): 412.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Miller, “Reality and Art,” 236.

<sup>49</sup> Lara, “Visual Preaching,” 269.

However, in the modern day, quite often this sort of preaching to the senses is “jettisoned from the church and considered simple, unsophisticated.”<sup>50</sup> For some people, an “historical snobbery” allows them easily to discard such methods as belonging only to the Dark Ages. The assumption is that people don’t need such teaching anymore, having moved beyond that with their ability to read. As a result, James Bates’ view is that the typical Protestant “churches and chapels are bleak and bare.”<sup>51</sup> It is true that, in Western cultures, today’s congregation is literate. It is also clear that the visual elements of worship in the Middle Ages led to forms of idolatry and superstition. But perhaps “modern” churches hurt themselves by overreacting, throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.

Bates points out that it is not only children whose learning is assisted by the use of visuals. “Adults, though more accustomed to listening [than children], find that concentration flags and the message is forgotten if they have to depend on their hearing alone.”<sup>52</sup> While the learning patterns and methods differ somewhat between adults and children, it would seem to be inaccurate to hold that the use of physical objects is only fitting for children. Experience, as well as scientific study, has confirmed that visuals help people of all ages when it comes to learning, even from the pulpit.

### 3. Does the use of physical objects trivialize the message or deepen it?

For some preachers, a major drawback for using physical objects in sermons is the conviction that such a method would undermine the significance of what was being

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<sup>50</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> James B. Bates, “The Pastor’s Opportunities XXIV. The Use of Visual Aids,” *The Expository Times* 100, no. 7 (April 1989): 249.

<sup>52</sup> Bates, “Visual Aids,” 249.



spoken. It is seen as turning the church service into a form of entertainment which no longer addresses the deeper spiritual needs of people. It is extremely disconcerting to MacArthur, for example, “as church after church jumps on the show-business bandwagon.”<sup>53</sup> In his eyes, pastors “tailor the church service to whatever will draw a crowd....The congregation is served a slick, professional show, where drama, pop music, and maybe a soft-sell sermon constitute the worship service. But the emphasis isn't on worship, it's on entertainment.”<sup>54</sup>

If this is, in fact, what happens whenever a preacher makes use of physical objects as part of a sermon, it is serious indeed. However, there are other voices that protest against such broad characterizations. Blackwood objects to “the implication...that any form of teaching other than lecture falls into the realm of entertainment.”<sup>55</sup> Obviously this is a very significant issue since it rests at the heart of the corporate worship event which forms a core activity for most believers. Does the use of physical objects in a sermon inevitably lead to “entertainment?”

According to MacArthur, such an approach only feeds “people’s appetite for entertainment [which] exacerbates the problems of mindless emotion, apathy, and materialism.”<sup>56</sup> This agrees with the thinking of Snapp, who believes that “worship services in many churches have become mindless. The Word of God has been dumbed down.”<sup>57</sup> Yet Blackwood claims the only way to label vision-oriented teaching as *mindless* is to fail “to realize that the eyes and other senses are conduits to the brain.

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<sup>53</sup> John MacArthur, “Gimme That Showtime Religion,” *Grace to You*, 2014, first paragraph, accessed October 25, 2014, <http://www.gty.org/resources/Articles/A163/Gimme-That-Showtime-Religion>.

<sup>54</sup> MacArthur, “Showtime Religion,” third paragraph.

<sup>55</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 80.

<sup>56</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 71.

<sup>57</sup> Snapp, “Veneration of Visual.”

Visual communication does not seek to bypass the mind; it simply seeks to reach the mind through the mental receptors, that is, the senses.”<sup>58</sup> This means that teaching using visual elements is in reality more *mind-full* than *mind-less*. Rather than watering down the truth, in Blackwood’s experience, when one remains loyal to the biblical text, multisensory preaching makes the truth more vivid and clear.<sup>59</sup> Some of today’s preachers who alter the Gospel message to make it “more acceptable” actually use a strictly lecture format. This supports his contention that, when it comes to watering down the message, “style is not the issue, content is.”<sup>60</sup>

There does seem to be general agreement that there are cases when the style of visual teaching is elevated to such an extent that churches are seen to be “embracing a spectacle.”<sup>61</sup> Even Blackwood acknowledges that multisensory preaching can devolve into teaching that is “carnival-like.” He says, “I must confess that I have witnessed multisensory teaching that had the appearance of a sideshow....In the wrong hands, it can cheapen the message and steal the glory that belongs to God.”<sup>62</sup> Undoubtedly visual elements in a sermon can be misused and become destructive, even as rhetorical skills and methods can. But does that mean that the use of physical objects in a sermon will *always* result in a “spectacle” which degrades the Gospel message or that it is merely a possibility? Is it a straightforward case of cause and effect or is that being too simplistic?

While there are those who decry the use of what they call “circus-like” and “spectacular” methods of preaching, others believe there is danger of discarding the good with the bad. Some uses of visual preaching may be inappropriate, but not all. Garrison

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<sup>58</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 74.

<sup>59</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 37, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 78.

<sup>61</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 202.

<sup>62</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 39, 80.

defends this position by pointing out, “If vivid and unconventional methods make preaching worthless some very familiar names must head the list of homiletical failures.” He then goes on to describe the preaching of Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, John the Baptist, Jesus, John Wesley, and George Whitefield.<sup>63</sup>

There are critics who maintain that this new direction in preaching is merely following the latest fad to come along. Instead of the Church *being an influence upon* the culture, some people, like Hunt, accuse it of merely *being influenced by* the culture around it. He explains his disappointment this way: “Drama, dance, video clips, rock and roll, TV talk show formats, and eating in the services are just some of the elements of the growing ‘worship renewal movement,’ where people attend church much in the same manner as they watch *Wheel of Fortune*. A critical examination would indicate that the movement is a by-product of a culture that has been weaned on television.”<sup>64</sup> Blackwood disagrees. In his view, not only is preaching that involves the different senses more effective, but it is also biblical. He points out, “The Passover drama played out in Egypt pictured the blood of the Lamb of God on the cross. The pastor who teaches in a multi-sensory form is not mimicking the culture; he is mimicking the Creator.”<sup>65</sup>

Ironically, it is the amazing power of visually-inclusive teaching that becomes one of its greatest dangers. Lloyd Perry expresses the potential hazard when he says, “One of [the risks] is to make the visual aid so interesting that the listeners forget the message and remember only the visual aid.”<sup>66</sup> A similar warning is issued by Mathewson: “Props

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<sup>63</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 245.

<sup>64</sup> Hunt, *Vanishing Word*, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 77.

<sup>66</sup> Lloyd M. Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today's World* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 182.

tend to attract attention and take on lives of their own, though, so be careful.”<sup>67</sup> When this happens, the visual illustration has a greater impact in the minds of the congregation than the truth of the message. Thus the message has indeed been trivialized.

That is why Flynn, a strong proponent of all forms of illustrations, has this cautionary note: “Illustrations must be subordinate to [the] meaty content. Substance is primary; illustrations are secondary and subsidiary.”<sup>68</sup> After all, he points out, a good illustration is to *illuminate* the truth being emphasized rather than drawing attention to itself.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, Chapell contends that “illustrations work best when the preacher uses them to affect the will of the hearers. Such use ennobles illustrations by taking them from the realm of entertainment and placing them in a servant relationship to a sermon’s expository purposes.”<sup>70</sup> There is great danger if this advice is ignored. According to Garrison, “Unless a visual illustration actually illuminates, it is rightly regarded as cheap and phoney.”<sup>71</sup> Hence it is essential that visual objects used by a preacher play a supportive, secondary role. However, that role is still an important one. Flynn reminds his readers, “Though illustrative material is subordinate, it is not trifling. Nothing about communicating God’s truth is trivial. Whatever can clarify divine truth cannot be irresponsibly or frivolously fluffed off.”<sup>72</sup>

One helpful principle is to ensure that the visual object fits with the core aim of the message. Steven and Susan Beebe stress, “Don’t select a visual aid until you have

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<sup>67</sup> Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 155.

<sup>68</sup> Flynn, *Come Alive*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> Flynn, *Come Alive*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Chapell, *Using Illustrations*, location 1466-1467.

<sup>71</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 249.

<sup>72</sup> Flynn, *Come Alive*, 21.

decided on the purpose of your speech.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, never start with a visual illustration and then build a sermon around it. While it may at times be tempting, such an approach turns the sermon preparation process on its head. An exegetical sermon begins with the chosen Scripture passage, determining the core truth or the Big Idea. That clear sermon objective then becomes the filter through which all other elements of the message are evaluated, including any physical objects.

The power of visual communication can be a potent ally for the preacher. However, that does not excuse the preacher from the challenging exegetical study of the text. This is Flynn’s advice: “Illustrations are not substitutes for thoughts. Don’t let preoccupation with illustrations keep you from analytical thinking and reasoned exposition. The secondary should never squeeze out the substantial.”<sup>74</sup> The hard work must still be done by the pastor to make sure the sermon has biblical truth for content which is being supported by the visual elements.

One could say that this issue primarily revolves around biblical accuracy. In MacArthur’s opinion, the reason visuals trivialize the message is because preachers are more focused on what the audience wants rather than on what God says. He declares, “Biblical correctness is the *only* framework by which we must evaluate all ministry methods.”<sup>75</sup> While this may sound good and spiritual, it must be questioned whether such a statement is actually biblical. Jesus taught that it was only those who did what he commanded who would enter heaven. Then he made sure he was being clear by telling

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<sup>73</sup> Steven A. Beebe and Susan J. Beebe, *Public Speaking: An Audience-Centered Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 258.

<sup>74</sup> Flynn, *Come Alive*, 80.

<sup>75</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed*, 78.

the parable of the builders (Matt 7:21, 24-27). It is not “biblical correctness” but rather “changed lives” in line with Scripture which is the *only* measure of all Christian ministry.

This doesn’t mean that biblical truth is unimportant, however. Blackwood readily acknowledges this, saying, “Textual accuracy is the most critical portion of biblical teaching. Second to that is the need for verbal clarity....Visual aids and interaction with the audience should be viewed as aids to that process. The end goal is to produce ‘doers of the Word’...”<sup>76</sup> The debate about objects is connected to the second part of that equation—verbal clarity—not the first. Stanley and Jones put it this way: “*Attention and retention is determined by presentation, not information. Presentation matters.*”<sup>77</sup> Even MacArthur has to admit grudgingly “I do believe we can be innovative and creative in how we present the gospel, but we have to be careful to harmonize our methods with the profound spiritual truth we are trying to convey.”<sup>78</sup> It should not be said that the use of physical objects in a sermon will trivialize the biblical message, since content and clarity, while connected, are still two different matters. Perhaps Garrison’s words capture the issue best: “Any method is valid, provided that a speaker conscientiously uses it, not to gain personal praise but to interest his listeners in his message and persuade them to act upon it for their own eternal good.”<sup>79</sup>

#### 4. Is verbal communication the most effective method for a sermon?

Another issue which arises is whether or not human speech, which is received through hearing, is simply the best form of communication. In examining the record of

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<sup>76</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Stanley and Jones, *Change*, chap. 15, 3.

<sup>78</sup> MacArthur, *Showtime Religion*, second last paragraph.

<sup>79</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 247.

the New Testament Church, there is an unmistakable emphasis on preaching being a verbal event. For example, in Rom 10:14, while speaking about salvation and evangelism, Paul says, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” A few verses later, Paul concludes the subject with these words: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (v. 17). J. I. Packer believes that there are two reasons behind the emphasis in the New Testament on verbal preaching. The first explanation is that “the good news had to be spread and the only way to spread news in the ancient world was by oral announcement.”<sup>80</sup> The second reason was “because of the power of ‘incarnational’ communication, in which the speaker illuminates that which he proclaims by being transparently committed to it in a wholehearted and thoroughgoing way.”<sup>81</sup> It would seem that, according to Olcott, “incarnational” communication for Packer only happens “through the verbal communication of a preacher in a live situation.”<sup>82</sup>

However, arguments can also be made for the impact of communication which is both visual and verbal. For example, people naturally place a greater importance on sight than all the other senses. In 350 BC, Aristotle declared, “we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.”<sup>83</sup> Seven hundred years later, Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, compared the difference between perceiving through the eyes and through the ears when he said, “Why need I now describe the skillful architectural

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<sup>80</sup> J. I. Packer, “Why Preach?” in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1986), 16. See also J. I. Packer, *Engaging the Written Word of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 243.

<sup>81</sup> Packer, “Why Preach?” 243.

<sup>82</sup> Neil D. Olcott, “The Use of Multimedia to Help Preach Christ” (DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1997), 17.

<sup>83</sup> Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1.1 [980a].

arrangement and the surpassing beauty of each part, when the evidence of our eyes makes instruction through the ears unnecessary.”<sup>84</sup> The point Eusebius was making was not that words were superfluous but rather that, in some cases, seeing something is much more effective than hearing a description.

It should be understood that a discussion on the use of objects in sermons is not a question of using only words versus only visuals. Rather, the issue is whether words by themselves are more effective than words paired with other senses, in this case the sense of sight. When the matter is framed in this way, even people who greatly emphasize the unique power of the spoken word acknowledge the need and benefit of including the other senses. Chester Pennington, who strongly favours the speaking nature of preaching, concedes, “It may be accompanied and supplemented by other forms: sights, sounds, nonverbal expressions.”<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Stott recognizes the need for balance: “There are four ways in which human beings learn: by listening, discussing, watching and discovering....The first is the most direct, mouth to ear, speaker to hearer, and of course includes preaching. But it is not by any means always the most effective.”<sup>86</sup>

Hearing and seeing each have areas of strength when it comes to learning. Garrison clarifies this concept: “Though the spoken word is vital in teaching, entertainment, and persuasion, the stimuli which reach the brain through one’s eyes are generally far more numerous than those caught by the ears. No other organ of perception even approaches the human eye in terms of sensitivity, adaptability, and power of synthesis.”<sup>87</sup> According to Shane Hipps, the printed and spoken word is processed by the

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<sup>84</sup> Eusebius *Church History* 10.4.44.

<sup>85</sup> Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem* (New York: Hawthorn, 1976), 47.

<sup>86</sup> Stott, *Two Worlds*, 76.

<sup>87</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 232.



left side of the brain “which specializes in logic, sequence, and categories.” In contrast, pictures are dealt with by the right side of the brain, which “specializes in intuition and perceiving the *gestalt*—or everything at once.”<sup>88</sup>

Credible research has been done which supports the strong influence of sight in the process of learning. For example, a study was completed by Passingham, Toni and Rushworth in 2000. They confirmed that there is an increase in learning-related activity in the brain when visual elements are included.<sup>89</sup> One reason why teaching that includes visuals is so effective is that learning with the eyes is faster since “we take in data from text in a sequential fashion, while we process visuals in an instant.”<sup>90</sup> Yet not everyone sees this as a benefit. Vibert believes that hearing is actually better because it is slower, which “gives the time needed for detailed thought and analysis.”<sup>91</sup> Writers, such as Regier, disagree with such a position. In his perspective, “Audiovisuals can speed learning....Where factual material is concerned, we can teach more in less time. Then we have more time for the application of truth to life.”<sup>92</sup> For the preacher who desires life change in the congregation, this in itself can be a powerful argument for using objects.

Some people claim that teaching which uses multiple senses is potent because it “can better approximate natural settings.”<sup>93</sup> Erk Barnouw describes it as matching “the

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<sup>88</sup> Shane Hipps, “But Now I See,” *Leadership* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 23.

<sup>89</sup> R. E. Passingham, I. Toni, and M.F. Rushworth, “Specialization within the prefrontal cortex : the ventral prefrontal cortex and associative learning,” *Experimental Brain Research* 133, no. 1 (2000): 103–113, abstract in Index Copernicus International, accessed October 24, 2014, <http://journals.indexcopernicus.com/abstract.php?icid=596887>.

<sup>90</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 15.

<sup>91</sup> Vibert, “Word,” 151.

<sup>92</sup> Donald P. Regier, “Audiovisual Support for Your Teaching,” in *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Teaching*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and Howard G. Hendricks (n.p.: Victor, 1988), 196.

<sup>93</sup> Shams and Seitz, “Multisensory Learning,” 411.

complexity and richness and all-at-onceness of face-to-face communication.”<sup>94</sup> It is the opinion of Hipps that the recent cultural shift back toward the visual is actually a movement directed by God, in order to correct the imbalanced cultural extremes of “the left-brain dominance of the print age.”<sup>95</sup> Stated another way, teaching that involves both the eyes and ears is effective because it reflects the way God intended us to communicate.

Is strictly verbal teaching the most effective way to preach? It would appear that such a position would be difficult to prove. On the contrary, the evidence continues to point to a combination of sight and sound as the most natural, efficient and effective approach for communicating God’s Word from the pulpit.

##### 5. Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?

It may be helpful to look at the same issue, but from the other direction. It has been established that it is questionable, at the very least, to say that the strictly verbal style of preaching is the best approach for communicating a sermon. Can it then be said that using both words and visuals together results in the most effective preaching?

Some feel strongly that physical objects are completely unnecessary. Brooks dismisses such practices, stating, “When the word is spoken and heard as an audible bridge between heaven and earth, then there is no need to regret the absence of visual aids, musical backing, audience participation, multi-media fireworks or any other such diversion.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Garner refers to props and costumes as simply “gimmicks.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Erk Barnouw, “McLuhanism Reconsidered,” *The Saturday Review*, July 23, 1966, 19, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1966jul23-00019>.

<sup>95</sup> Hipps, “Now I See,” 22.

<sup>96</sup> Brooks, “Audio-Visual Age,” 122.

<sup>97</sup> Garner, *Character*, 61.

Many argue, however, that such verbal-only communication ignores the way in which humans were created. Referring to 1 John 1:1, Gorman points out that “God gave to humankind a Word that could be experienced with all the senses. Today we...preach to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic souls.”<sup>98</sup> She is speaking of the preferred learning style that each person has. In Blackwood’s words, “Some people in our congregations prefer to learn by hearing; others need to see the concept in order to learn it; still many others learn best by interacting with the teacher.”<sup>99</sup> Based on this reality, it seems obvious to Ladan Shams and Aaron Seitz why teaching should be aimed at more than one sense, since “a simple advantage of multisensory training is that it can engage individuals with different learning styles.”<sup>100</sup>

While recognizing that there are different learning styles, Gorman opposes the concept of multisensory preaching, which she feels is inappropriate for a worship service. In her opinion, “the examples we use in sermons and the vocabulary we employ” are sufficient if all the learning styles are taken into account.<sup>101</sup> But if there are no biblical grounds for limiting a visual preaching method, is this the wisest approach?

Blackwood insists that the process of learning begins with the senses. “This is precisely why the senses cannot be ignored when it comes to sound biblical teaching ...they are the gates to the brain.”<sup>102</sup> But he laments the reality that “in most churches, the information is broadcast in one channel only—verbal. Most pastors are ‘verbal only’ communicators. In other words, if you don’t learn well by hearing, you are out of

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<sup>98</sup> Gorman, “Senses,” 117, 112.

<sup>99</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 14-15.

<sup>100</sup> Shams and Seitz, “Multisensory Learning,” 415.

<sup>101</sup> Gorman, “Senses,” 114.

<sup>102</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 62.

luck.”<sup>103</sup> But it doesn’t need to be this way. There is an opportunity for people with all the different learning styles to benefit from the preached word. McClellan states it plainly: “A sermon doesn’t have to be simply an auditory experience. The more sensory experiences built into the sermon, the more engaging it becomes.”<sup>104</sup>

The reason for the greater impact of a multisensory sermon is described by Sweazey. When “the preacher is by sound and sight transmitting over multiple channels...this is one way to provide the ‘redundancy’ which communication specialists insist increases the effect.”<sup>105</sup> Citing recent studies, Shams and Seitz explain the concept of redundancy: “The principle of ‘dual coding’ indicates that information entering the system through multiple processing channels helps circumvent the limited processing capabilities of each individual channel and, thus, greater total information can be processed when spread between multiple senses.”<sup>106</sup> A. Skevington Wood captures the same idea, but expresses it in “laymen’s terms”: “an approach directed to Eye-Gate as well as Ear-Gate carries a double probability of penetration.”<sup>107</sup> As a result, the simple use of physical objects during a sermon elevates the teaching potential of any preacher. A study done by Vogel, Dickson and Lehman concluded that “a ‘typical’ presenter using visuals can be as effective as a ‘better’ presenter using no visuals.”<sup>108</sup>

In what specific ways do visuals improve the effects of a sermon? While the advantages are numerous, perhaps the “big three” benefits would be that preaching with visual elements helps with attention, comprehension and retention. Having people focus

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<sup>103</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 61.

<sup>104</sup> Dave McClellan, “Suspense,” *Leadership* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 55.

<sup>105</sup> Sweazey, *Good News*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> Shams and Seitz, “Multisensory Learning,” 415.

<sup>107</sup> A. Skevington Wood, *The Art of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 60.

<sup>108</sup> D. R. Vogel, O. W. Dickson, and J. A. Lehman, “Persuasion and the Role of Visual Presentation Support: The UM/3M Study,” University of Minnesota, 18, accessed June 17, 2012, <http://misrc.umn.edu/workingpapers/fullpapers/1986/8611.pdf>.

on, understand and remember the truth being proclaimed from the pulpit would likely be priorities for any preacher.

Sermons have long been criticized as boring experiences which must simply be endured. Back in 1857, English novelist Anthony Trollope captured this sentiment when he wrote, “There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilised and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons....No one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age.”<sup>109</sup> The term “sermon” equals “dull monotony” in the minds of many people! Robinson and Robinson concur: “More people have been bored out of the Christian faith than have been reasoned out of it. Dull, insipid sermons not only cause drooping eyes and nodding heads, they destroy life and hope.”<sup>110</sup>

Gaining and maintaining people’s attention during a sermon is not a peripheral issue. While biblical accuracy is central to communicating God’s truth, it is insufficient by itself. As observed by Stanley, “If [a sermon] is helpful but not engaging, then I am bored. And it may be stuff that I really need, but if you didn’t engage me, I can’t stay with you. You need to be helpful and engaging.”<sup>111</sup> While this is challenging for a preacher, it does not need to be complicated. Since “the human eye is attracted by motion, by brightness, and by color,” Regier affirms that “appropriate visuals capture and hold attention.”<sup>112</sup> This was verified in Blackwood’s own research which demonstrated that audience attention more than doubled through his use of visual elements in his

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<sup>109</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* (1857), 49, accessed Oct 23, 2014, <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/trollope-barchester-towers-49.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Ed Stetzer, “Andy Stanley on Communication,” *Christianity Today*, part 2, accessed October 25, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/march/andy-stanley-on-communication-part-2.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Regier, “Audiovisual Support,” 195-196.

sermons.<sup>113</sup> Given the eternal consequences connected with preaching, many would agree with Regier's comment: "If audiovisual materials did no more than create interest, we could probably justify them on that basis alone."<sup>114</sup>

Boredom among church goers is often caused by "communication predictability" which allows the listeners to anticipate what will be said even before it happens.<sup>115</sup> Focus is no longer needed. However, Stanley and Jones suggest how visuals can change all that: "The unexpected is always engaging....When something unusual happens, everybody is interested. So why not leverage this maxim to your advantage?"<sup>116</sup> Once people are engaged, learning is much more likely to take place.

The second of the "big three" reasons for using visual elements in a sermon is comprehension. No matter how true or profound a sermon is, it is in vain if the audience cannot follow what is being said. Blackwood maintains, "Nothing is more frustrating for a church audience than sitting through a sermon they don't understand."<sup>117</sup> One way of overcoming this danger is by the use of physical objects, which according to Baird, "make [the preacher's] idea vivid for his listeners."<sup>118</sup>

Comprehension is aided by visuals for several reasons. Wayland Cummings and Charles Somervill contend that they make communication more accurate, with less chance of misunderstanding.<sup>119</sup> The speed of visuals is also a factor. In Robert Horn's experience, they give people the ability "to take in, comprehend, and more efficiently

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<sup>113</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> Regier, "Audiovisual Support," 196.

<sup>115</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 26.

<sup>116</sup> Stanley and Jones, *Change*, chap. 15, 34.

<sup>117</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 27.

<sup>118</sup> Baird, *Preparing*, 117.

<sup>119</sup> H. Wayland Cummings and Charles Somervill, *Overcoming Communication Barriers in the Church* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1981), 34.

synthesize large amounts of new information.”<sup>120</sup> Given the typical time limitations of sermons, the efficiency of physical objects can be of great assistance to a preacher.

It must also be recognized that many of the spiritual truths found in God’s Word are abstract and complex. The challenging process which takes place when a listener encounters such an intangible concept, is depicted by Cummings and Somervill in this way: “Abstractness of communication often leads us to wanting a ‘replay’ of the message, a very difficult thing to do when it is presented orally in a sermon....Thus, a part of an orally presented message may be selected, leaving out other information.”<sup>121</sup> Rather than having the congregation mentally reviewing what they just heard—while missing what is currently being said—the preacher can employ visuals to help the process. The recommendation of Blackwood is that “verbal communication supported by visuals and interactive teaching can make many theological concepts easier to grasp.”<sup>122</sup>

Other biblical teachings can be difficult for modern-day believers to grasp due to the differences between today’s culture and that of the Bible times. Visuals assist in the learning process, according to Zuck, “by bridging time and distance gaps between today and what is being studied.”<sup>123</sup> Vines and Shaddix provide this example: “An actual yoke...is tremendously helpful in helping people to understand and apply Jesus’ invitation to get in the yoke with Him (Matt. 11:28-30).”<sup>124</sup> In his research, Blackwood discovered that audience understanding increased 73% when he added visuals to his spoken words. This is important because, “if the audience fails to comprehend the message we teach, it

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<sup>120</sup> Robert E. Horn, “Visual Language and Converging Technologies in the Next 10-15 Years (and Beyond): A paper prepared for the National Science Foundation Conference on Converging Technologies (Nano-Bio-Info-Cogno) for Improving Human Performance Dec. 3-4, 2001,” accessed October 24, 2014, <http://web.stanford.edu/~rhorn/a/recent/artcINSFVisualLangv.pdf>.

<sup>121</sup> Cummings and Somervill, *Communication Barriers*, 34.

<sup>122</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 164.

<sup>123</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 176.

<sup>124</sup> Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 337.

will be impossible for them to be ‘doers of the Word’ we teach.”<sup>125</sup> Significant comprehension is critical if lives are going to be transformed through preaching. This leads him to an obvious conclusion: “If multisensory communication can make our communication clearer, then common sense says we must consider its usage.”<sup>126</sup>

Of course, in order for those who listen to sermons to use the biblical truth after they go home, it is essential that they remember what they were taught. Blackwood expresses it this way: “As teachers of the Word, our mission is to etch biblical truth into the minds of our congregation. We want them to remember the truths we teach, so they can meditate on it and apply it to their lives. However, how can they act on what they don’t remember?”<sup>127</sup> Retention is the third of the “big three” benefits of visuals used in a message. Vines and Shaddix depict physical objects in sermons as driving “a memory stake into the listeners’ minds.”<sup>128</sup>

Many preachers have experienced this firsthand. David B. Smith confesses, “I decided to make the ‘brown paper sack’ a regular part of my preaching. People remember the point when it’s represented by a prop.”<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Naomi Penner, as a lay person, noticed over the years that one of the things which caused sermons to linger in her mind for a long time was the use of simple objects.<sup>130</sup> Blackwood’s personal research confirmed what has been claimed experientially. Retention by his congregation rose 62.2% when visuals were employed.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 55, 27.

<sup>126</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 27.

<sup>127</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 27.

<sup>128</sup> Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 336.

<sup>129</sup> David B. Smith, “What’s in the Brown Paper Sack? Props Make Sermons Stick,” *Leadership* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 42.

<sup>130</sup> Naomi Gaede Penner, “Sermon Variations That Made an Impression,” *Leadership* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 117.

<sup>131</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 57.



In addition to the “big three,” there are other reasons why it is best for a sermon to use both words and images together. One such rationale is that it is easier for people to have confidence in a sermon which involves sight. Evidence suggests that the five senses are not all equally accepted. It is the observation of Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore that “most people...suspect the ear; they don't trust it. In general we feel more secure when things are visible, when we can ‘see for ourselves.’”<sup>132</sup> This tendency is even seen in the Bible when Job, coming face-to-face with the Lord, exclaims, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). This trust issue is particularly evident when the senses seem to send conflicting messages. According to Cummings and Somervill, “since visual channels make a greater impact and are more accurately perceived, *one tends to believe what is seen more than what is heard, if the information seems to be in conflict.*”<sup>133</sup> In psychology, when the visual information overrules the other senses, it is called “visual capture” or “visual dominance.”<sup>134</sup> This inclination to trust sight first is even seen socially when people are labeled hypocrites if they say one thing yet do another. People tend to believe the actions they see rather than the words they hear.

One of the unfortunate consequences of today’s communication explosion, notes Pennington, is “the reduced value of words and our skeptical attitude as listeners....Many of the cleverest efforts at communication are commercially motivated....Words are used in order to manipulate us—and we know it. As a consequence, the integrity of language

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<sup>132</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message*, produced by Jerome Agel (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1967), 117, Internet Archive, accessed November 18, 2015, [https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-vNiFct6b-L5ucJEa/Marshall%20McLuhan%20-%20The%20Medium%20is%20The%20Message\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-vNiFct6b-L5ucJEa/Marshall%20McLuhan%20-%20The%20Medium%20is%20The%20Message_djvu.txt).

<sup>133</sup> Cummings and Somervill, *Communication Barriers*, 34.

<sup>134</sup> Lyle E. Bourne, Jr. and Bruce R. Ekstrand, *Psychology: Its Principles and Meanings*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 112.

is destroyed.”<sup>135</sup> What is a preacher to do if it is difficult for people to trust words? Research reveals that visual support offered alongside words strengthens the listeners’ trust and comfort with the one presenting, increasing the persuasive power of the presentation by 43%.<sup>136</sup>

There are other ways in which words and visuals working together create a powerful combination which reaches out to everyone. Horn portrays it as “useful in dealing with communication in multicultural situations.”<sup>137</sup> Not only does it bridge cultural gaps, but it also crosses over generation gaps, since visuals appeal to all ages.<sup>138</sup> Economically, the use of physical objects by a preacher is an option which is available to churches large or small, rich or poor. Surveys reveal that smaller churches are less likely to utilize what can be expensive audio-visual technologies.<sup>139</sup> This would especially be the case for churches in developing nations. The good news, according to Blackwood, is that physical objects elevate a sermon “at little cost to you in terms of time and energy.”<sup>140</sup> Whether dealing with diverse economic realities, ages or cultures, it appears that objects have a universal effectiveness in sermons.

The final reason why it is best for a preacher to use both words and visuals in a sermon is that there are likely some people in the congregation who require it. A study published in 2004 concluded “that environmental exposures, including types and degrees of stimulation, affect the number and the density of neuronal synapses. The types and intensity of visual and auditory experiences that children have early in life therefore may

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<sup>135</sup> Pennington, *Communication Problem*, 40.

<sup>136</sup> Vogel, Dickson, and Lehman, “Visual Presentation Support,” 3, 9.

<sup>137</sup> John Hopkins School of Education, “An Interview with Robert E. Horn,” 1999, under “QUESTION. Why should teachers be interested?” accessed October 24, 2014, <http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Arts%20in%20Education/horn.htm>.

<sup>138</sup> Wood, *Art of Preaching*, 61.

<sup>139</sup> Reed, “Preaching by Faith,” 26.

<sup>140</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 137.

have profound influences on brain development.”<sup>141</sup> The implication, as Blackwood sees it, is that “many people who sit in our congregation, especially the younger people, have brains that are neurologically rewired and neurologically dependent on multisensory teaching.”<sup>142</sup> If the listeners do not have a choice in how they learn, does the preacher of God’s Word really have any alternative other than to find a way to communicate to them?

Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images? With the many advantages which arise from such an approach as well as the requirements of some of those in the audiences, the answer would appear to be “yes.” In the words of Jensen, “Words need images to give them breathing room and to spark the imagination. Images need words to give them definition and meaning.”<sup>143</sup> Perhaps it is time to agree with Dyrness that “what is called for is a new alliance and interaction between the word and the image.”<sup>144</sup>

#### 6. Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

It is clear from the available books and articles about homiletics that there are a few people who have thought deeply and feel strongly about the use of physical objects in sermons. For various biblical, theological, sociological and pedagogical reasons, they believe that such methods are not appropriate. But what about the rest of the preachers who don’t follow such a sight-inclusive approach? What are the reasons behind the absence of objects in their messages? Various explanations have been offered which seek to move beyond the surface reasons in order to identify deeper motives.

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<sup>141</sup> Dimitri A. Christakis, Frederick J. Zimmerman, David L. DiGiuseppe, and Carolyn A. McCarty, “Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attentional Problems in Children,” *Pediatrics* 113, no. 4 (April 2004): 708.

<sup>142</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 36.

<sup>143</sup> Jensen, “Thinking,” 302.

<sup>144</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 132.

In the opinion of Litfin, the primary cause is simple indifference. He asserts that it “is usually the product of apathy rather than antipathy. Many speakers simply do not feel the need to make their ideas visual.”<sup>145</sup> This means that most people don’t care enough to go to the effort of making this change. Some justify it by pointing to Church history with the observation that the Church survived perfectly well without it for centuries. While conceding the truth to that comment, Johnston goes on to point out that “the early church flourished in the absence of many things that are now used regularly: electricity, facilities, Sunday schools, biblical commentaries, seminaries, even Willow Creek formats.”<sup>146</sup> Some of the apathy is likely due to preachers considering their sermons “good enough.” This is the concern of Blackwood, who suggests, “Many pastors and Christian educators settle for good teaching when they could easily elevate to great teaching, indeed to phenomenal teaching.”<sup>147</sup> For others, it seems the issue is more connected with tradition. Rather than try something new, it is easier to abide by what is customary, according to Wood.<sup>148</sup> This is often based on a “fear of criticism for use of ‘spectacular’ methods” since, in the words of Garrison, “many authorities have nothing but condemnation for anything that smacks of the unusual.”<sup>149</sup>

In Chromey’s experience, the biggest reason he hears from preachers for not embracing visual elements is “It’s not ‘my style.’” But he counters, “Preaching isn’t about me and what I like. We preach so that people might hear, believe, and become like

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<sup>145</sup> A. Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 212.

<sup>146</sup> Johnston, *Postmodern World*, 163.

<sup>147</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 11.

<sup>148</sup> Wood, *Art of Preaching*, 60.

<sup>149</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 244.

Jesus (Romans 10:13-15).”<sup>150</sup> Ultimately, it comes down to some soul-searching questions: “To what extreme are you willing to go to create a delivery system that will connect with the heart of your audience?...Are you willing to step out of your comfort zone in order to step into the lives God has placed in your care?”<sup>151</sup>

Another explanation offered by Blackwood is focused on reluctance to learn new communication techniques from others. “Many pastors and teachers develop one style of communication at the outset of their ministry and then never tweak it.” When sermons fail to change lives, it’s easier to blame the cold hearts of the congregation rather “than taking a hard look at our own effectiveness as communicators.”<sup>152</sup>

Not all of the blame, however, is laid at the feet of preachers. To some extent, the institutions which train pastors for ministry are also at fault. Samuel Miller maintains that we prepare people “to use words so as to be precise and powerful in their testimony in regard to the Word, and completely ignore their training in such images as would enable them to transmit their vision of reality.”<sup>153</sup> It therefore is no surprise that many preachers do not even think of the possibility of using objects when preparing a sermon.

The final reason why so few preachers employ visuals relates to the matter of time. When one is stressed and busy, Sweazey notes, “it takes less initiative just to talk.”<sup>154</sup> It is easier to resort back to the familiar while creativity is set aside. Even Blackwood admits that finding compelling visuals is “one of the pressures that make teaching so difficult” before adding “yet it is one on which great teaching depends.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Chromey, *Reimagined*, 17.

<sup>151</sup> Stanley and Jones, *Change*, part II, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 96, 44.

<sup>153</sup> S. Miller, “Reality and Art,” 236.

<sup>154</sup> Sweazey, *Good News*, 91.

<sup>155</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 134.

Each week many attitudes, pressures and insufficiencies push preachers away from making the effort to include physical objects as a part of their sermons. To counter that trend, Stanley and Jones paint a picture of the reality which is facing each preacher who stands in the pulpit: “Every single person who sits politely and listens to you on Sunday is one decision away from moral, financial, and marital ruin....Many are considering options with consequences that will follow them the remainder of their lives....There is much at stake.”<sup>156</sup> Ultimately, when deciding about the use of physical objects, the question which must be answered is “Which is the stronger motivation, the reasons for using physical objects or the reasons for not using them?”

### **C. VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH PHYSICAL OBJECTS CAN BE EMPLOYED IN SERMONS**

As all the major issues have been considered, it would seem that the evidence and arguments not only point toward objects being permissible and fitting for a sermon, but even strongly advantageous. For the preacher who truly wants to communicate in a way that leads to changed lives, visual aids can be strategic tools which greatly increase the power of the spoken word. Since including physical objects is new for many people who proclaim God’s Word, some basic directions and principles of use may be helpful. When including physical objects in a message, it is easy to limit oneself to only one approach. However, as will be described below, the use of these items can be quite varied. In fact, this flexibility of how objects can be employed is one of the features which makes them so practical. By alternating the following five techniques, sermons can make regular use of objects while still remaining fresh and unpredictable.

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<sup>156</sup> Stanley and Jones, *Change*, part II, 3-4.

### 1. Start the sermon with an object.

In considering the ability of visuals to capture people's attention and quickly encapsulate an idea, Blackwood urges preachers to consider starting sermons with a physical object. He recommends, "If possible, begin visually. Design a visual illustration that connects to the Big Idea of the sermon and begin your sermon with the visual. This will awaken the senses quickly, and it will help you grab audience attention at the beginning."<sup>157</sup> Wood concurs, since illustrations, in general, "can provide an excellent start to a sermon. It is one of the most useful ways of launching into a theme."<sup>158</sup>

### 2. Use an object throughout the whole sermon.

Another method is to have a single physical object which is referred to over the course of an entire message, providing a common thread that holds the sermon all together. This is a technique suggested by Vines and Shaddix, who describe it as a "running illustration."<sup>159</sup> Bates offers one example of this approach: "Diagrams are always helpful and can fix an idea in the memory. The preacher who can build up a diagram as the sermon progresses will hold the attention of young and old."<sup>160</sup>

### 3. Connect an object to a particular truth.

Probably the most common way of incorporating physical objects into a message is to use them to add strength to a particular point that is being stated. In the words of

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<sup>157</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 120.

<sup>158</sup> Wood, *Art of Preaching*, 62.

<sup>159</sup> Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 337.

<sup>160</sup> Bates, "Visual Aids," 250.

Roy DeBrand, “Objects can be a strong reinforcement to truth in any sermon.”<sup>161</sup> These visual illustrations allow the truth to sink deeper into people’s hearts and minds. A long list of examples is provided by William Evans, including “a flower...to illustrate the resurrection; a magnet, the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit; a watch, the complex character of the human frame as it sets forth the wisdom of God.”<sup>162</sup> Not only can they help clarify or prove an idea, but they can also help that idea stay in people’s minds.

#### 4. Assign one object to each major point of the sermon.

Another interesting approach is to attach one object to each section of the sermon. This allows the listeners to have greater clarity in the overall direction of the message. Beebe and Beebe maintain, “*Visual aids help listeners organize ideas*. Most listeners need help understanding the structure of your speech.”<sup>163</sup> The result for the audience is less mental strain and greater ease in following what is being said.

#### 5. Finish the sermon with an object.

Finally, the physical objects can become part of the climax of a message. The power of the visual can be utilized to help drive home the need for action. Wood proposes that “an illustration can round off a sermon and pave the way for application and appeal.”<sup>164</sup> In all likelihood, the last thing that people experience with their eyes and ears will be the clearest idea they will take home with them.

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<sup>161</sup> Roy DeBrand, “The Visual in Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 405.

<sup>162</sup> William Evans, *How to Prepare Sermons and Gospel Addresses* (Chicago: Moody, n.d.), 143.

<sup>163</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 247.

<sup>164</sup> Wood, *Art of Preaching*, 63.



### **D. GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING OBJECTS FOR A SERMON**

While it could be said that there is no limit on the physical objects a preacher could include in a sermon, in reality not all objects “were created equal.” Selecting the right object is an important decision. Even as a good choice will greatly enhance a sermon, a poor choice can diminish a sermon’s effectiveness. Robinson and Robinson offer this cautionary note: “Careful thought should be given to any props you might use. Unnecessary props are an encumbrance and can easily become a distraction to you and to your listeners.”<sup>165</sup> In order to reduce the chance of a poor choice, several guidelines are suggested for the preacher wanting to find the most effective objects to use in a message.

#### 1. Look for objects mentioned in the biblical text.

A good place to start is in the Bible itself. Often there are objects mentioned in the text that is being studied, which could easily—or with a small amount of effort—become a visual part of a sermon. Many potential visuals can be found in the Scriptures. The key is to have eyes which are looking in the text for those opportunities.

#### 2. Turn verbal illustrations into visual illustrations.

Similarly, tangible objects can also arise out of a regular illustration. DeBrand offers this advice: “Often we explain, illustrate, or apply truth in a sermon by talking about some object, an object which can be used to get the point across. Instead of merely talking about it, why not actually take the object with you and show it while referring to

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<sup>165</sup> Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell*, 67.

it.”<sup>166</sup> This simple practice can make using visuals more natural, even for those new to this approach.

### 3. Keep it simple, especially at first.

When searching for visuals, Beebe and Beebe recommend that “simple visuals usually communicate best....Resist trying to make your visuals complicated.”<sup>167</sup> The more complex the physical object being used, the more potential there is for problems, confusion, etc. While more experience can lead to greater ability and confidence, Blackwood agrees that at first the motto should be “Start out simple.”<sup>168</sup>

### 4. Ensure the object is visible.

Visibility must also be considered. Whatever objects you choose to use, Chris Knights urges preachers to “think about whether everyone will be able to see them.”<sup>169</sup> Even though common sense would seem to make this obvious, many speakers seem to forget to follow this principle.<sup>170</sup> If the audience can’t see the object, obviously the visual impact is lost.

### 5. Create the object during the sermon.

Sometimes the physical object is, in a sense, created by the preacher who draws a picture or produces a chart while preaching. Garrison insists that one doesn’t need to be

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<sup>166</sup> DeBrand, “Visual in Preaching,” 405.

<sup>167</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 262.

<sup>168</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 94.

<sup>169</sup> Chris Knights, “Why Preach? How to Prepare for it?” *The Expository Times* 115, no. 4 (January 2004): 121.

<sup>170</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 258.

an artist to make this work.<sup>171</sup> A simple drawing can easily achieve all the goals of a good visual sermon illustration. In addition, it has the advantage of standing at the end of the message as “a visible record” of what was discussed.<sup>172</sup>

#### 6. Refer to objects already present in the room.

There may be occasions when a preacher can point out physical objects which are always visible but often not seen by the worshipers. Sweazey gives the example of stained-glass windows, whose beauty and special meaning can be used to illustrate an important truth.<sup>173</sup> It is possible to use such objects in a way that helps people see them with new eyes.

#### 7. Design the platform with visual cues.

Another way to incorporate larger objects is to consider the entire stage or platform, especially when no longer a “beginner” with physical objects. Blackwood has observed that in the past church platforms were “designed to promote tradition and liturgy” whereas today the focus is on learning. Because of this change, a stage with visual cues connected to the theme can greatly assist the preacher.<sup>174</sup>

#### 8. Use costumes for first-person narrative sermons.

What should be done visually with a first-person narrative sermon? Perhaps a full costume is the right choice at times. However, it should be remembered that, on some

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<sup>171</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 248.

<sup>172</sup> Bates, “Visual Aids,” 250.

<sup>173</sup> Sweazey, *Good News*, 90.

<sup>174</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 112.

occasions, a “single-item costume” can be just as effective—even more so—than a lot of clothing and gear. Robinson and Robinson ask, “What would Moses be without a staff, little David without his slingshot, or Pilate without a washbasin?”<sup>175</sup>

#### 9. Avoid the uncontrollable, as well as other inappropriate objects.

There are some things which would be best avoided. Usually it would be wise to steer clear of animals or children as part of a message. Beebe and Beebe caution, “At best, they may steal the show. And most often, they are unpredictable.”<sup>176</sup> Additionally, dangerous or illegal objects should always be avoided.<sup>177</sup>

#### 10. Choose fresh objects over the predictable.

Sometimes the first idea a preacher has for an object will be what everyone expects. When deciding between objects, it’s best to opt for the one which is intriguing and fresh. McClellan notes, “A wooden cross, while applicable to suffering, won’t generate much suspense. But an IV bag suspended from its holder will.”<sup>178</sup>

#### 11. Make certain there is a clear connection.

While it is important to have an interesting visual, it is essential that the object also have a clear link to what is being taught. This warning from McClellan spells out the risk: “A bad connection between the item and your point will make the whole thing

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<sup>175</sup> Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell*, 67.

<sup>176</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 262.

<sup>177</sup> Baird, *Preparing*, 118.

<sup>178</sup> McClellan, “Suspense,” 54.

seem gimmicky.”<sup>179</sup> If an inordinate amount of time is needed to help people see the link between the object and the point being made, it likely means that it will not be an effective illustration.

While there is much to consider when searching for the best objects, many of these principles are based on common sense and become more natural over time. As a preacher begins to change her or his way of thinking, what will be discovered is that “the imagination of the speaker is about the only limit” when it comes to identifying physical objects that can elevate a sermon.<sup>180</sup> [See Appendix 2 for twenty examples of objects which can be used in a sermon.] In the end, it is a simple thing to do if it means more lives will be transformed by the Gospel.

### **E. GUIDELINES FOR USING OBJECTS IN A SERMON**

Choosing the right object for a sermon is very important, but it doesn’t guarantee effectiveness. There are other factors which can have a positive or negative impact on the success of the physical objects. Several guidelines have therefore been suggested on how best to use objects when preaching.

#### 1. Good preparation is important.

One of the most critical practices to follow with physical objects is good preparation. “If you are struggling to manage multisensory teaching tools,” warns Blackwood, “it will be distracting to you and distracting to your audience.”<sup>181</sup> To help ensure smooth presentation, several aspects of preparation should be given attention. If a

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<sup>179</sup> McClellan, “Suspense,” 54.

<sup>180</sup> Baird, *Preparing*, 117.

<sup>181</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 95.

preacher is new at using physical objects in a sermon, it would be wise to expect a period of discomfort until, with experience, it becomes more natural. Blackwood cautions that the new practice “may seem weird at first; it may feel awkward; it may even feel wrong. You will need to be prepared for that change so that it does not mess with your head.”<sup>182</sup> The simple step of anticipating such feelings can greatly reduce their impact.

Another element of preparation involves gathering, organizing, and, at times, even making the physical object to be used. The advice of Beebe and Beebe is to “prepare your visual aid well in advance of your speaking date. Avoid late-night, last-minute visual aid construction.”<sup>183</sup> An eleventh-hour flurry of pulling together the physical object you need will most likely have a harmful effect on the message’s presentation.

When the object is ready, the next step is to try to use it before you stand in front of your audience. Robinson and Robinson recommend to the preacher, “If you use a prop, be sure to rehearse using it so that you are comfortable with it.”<sup>184</sup> This will not only give the speaker greater confidence, but will also reveal logistical challenges that can be dealt with ahead of time.

A less obvious aspect of preparation revolves around the unexpected. Beebe and Beebe point out that “when you use visual aids, you increase the chance that problems or snags will develop when you present your speech.” That is a challenge which is inherent with using visual elements in a message. As part of the preparation, their advice is to “have a backup plan in case your best-laid plans go awry.”<sup>185</sup> In this way, the sermon

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<sup>182</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 94.

<sup>183</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 259.

<sup>184</sup> Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell*, 67.

<sup>185</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 263.

doesn't derail, and the audience can quickly relax again as the message proceeds. Good preparation always pays good dividends.

## 2. Length of exposure of the object must be considered.

Another guideline for effective use of physical objects pertains to the length of exposure to the audience. However, this will require some discernment on the part of the preacher because there are differing perspectives. Some people, such as Garrison, suggest limited exposure of an object is best. He says it this way: "Introduced in order to make an emphasis clear and vivid, they should be removed from sight when their function has been served." If not they become the preacher's "competitor."<sup>186</sup> In contrast, McClellan believes the object should be exposed early enough that it helps build curiosity in the audience. He argues, "If we wait to bring out the prop until it's needed, we've missed an opportunity to utilize suspense."<sup>187</sup> Even an object that is still covered creates interest. Stanley and Jones maintain, "When you have stuff on stage covered with a sheet, you are already ahead of the guy down the street before you even start preaching."<sup>188</sup> So what is a preacher to do? Should the physical objects have long exposure or short exposure? Perhaps the best guideline is for the speaker to be aware that longer exposure can at times be a distraction while on other occasions it can provoke curiosity and suspense. Thus, a careful decision is required.

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<sup>186</sup> Garrison, *Preacher*, 249.

<sup>187</sup> McClellan, "Suspense," 54-55.

<sup>188</sup> Stanley and Jones, *Change*, chap. 15, 32.

### 3. Remain audience-focused.

It is also important to remain audience-focused when utilizing objects in a message. For Baird this means eye contact with the congregation. He encourages the preacher, “Continue to speak all the time you are manipulating the object....Practice until you can keep your eyes on the audience most of the time.”<sup>189</sup> On the other hand, Kenneth McFarland emphasizes that the use of physical objects should not lead to “long periods of dead silence.”<sup>190</sup> It is important that the people always feel a connection with the preacher and that the object not hinder that bond.

### 4. Always give the necessary explanation.

An important principle is raised by Chapell for illustrations in general, which is also very applicable for preachers using objects. He insists, “If there is no interpretation, then there is no meaning. Preachers must somehow interpret the illustrations they use, for the raw data of an experience does not explain itself.”<sup>191</sup> When physical objects are a part of the sermon, simply showing the object is not enough. An explanation of the visual is required in order for it to have a clear message. Some objects will require only minimal verbal clarification while others may need to be carefully explained so the impact is not lost.

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<sup>189</sup> Baird, *Preparing*, 118.

<sup>190</sup> Kenneth McFarland, *Eloquence in Public Speaking* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961), 202.

<sup>191</sup> Chapell, *Using Illustrations*, location 812-813.



### 5. Never pass the object around.

Beebe and Beebe also stress that the physical object should never be passed around for people to look at. Not only will the one holding the object be preoccupied, but also everyone surrounding it.<sup>192</sup> Those who will soon be receiving the item will be looking toward it in anticipation. The people who currently are handling the object will be focused on it rather than the speaker. Once the item moves on, oftentimes the people who just had it are talking with their neighbours about it or watching those who are just receiving it. The result is that the object which was to be strengthening what the preacher was saying becomes the competition for the audience's attention.

### 6. Frequency of the use of physical objects needs to be thought through.

The final guideline to consider revolves around frequency of use. Similar to the length of exposure of an object, there is not agreement on how often physical objects should be used in a sermon. There are some who fully appreciate and support their value, but feel that such tools should be limited in how often they are used. Penner believes that "such approaches needn't become standard fare, a liturgy of creative technique."<sup>193</sup> McClellan agrees, adding, "A prop every week becomes redundant."<sup>194</sup> But there are others who believe such a policy is establishing a false or unnecessary limitation. While cautioning that objects should not be overused thus becoming a crutch, it is the conviction of Vines and Shaddix that preachers should "seek every appropriate opportunity to augment [their] sermons with visual aids."<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Beebe and Beebe, *Public Speaking*, 260.

<sup>193</sup> Penner, "Sermon Variations," 117.

<sup>194</sup> McClellan, "Suspense," 54.

<sup>195</sup> Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 334-335.

How does one resolve these seemingly contradictory opinions? If the physical objects are always being employed in the same way, they could easily become redundant or expected for the listeners. However, it has already been seen that there are a variety of approaches with visuals which can maintain their freshness and unpredictability. It should also be reiterated that each time objects are used, they must be clearly supporting the message which is being spoken. Finally, it is entirely possible that the frequency of use depends on the congregation, each one being unique. In the end, discernment on the part of the preacher is essential when deciding how often to make use of physical objects.

#### **F. ANALYSIS OF SERMONS USING PHYSICAL OBJECTS**

In order to evaluate the practicality and difficulty level of the various suggestions and guidelines offered in this chapter, a number of sermons were analyzed in which the preacher made use of physical objects. For this analysis, questions were chosen which represented each section covered in this chapter [see Appendix 3 for analysis and results]. The preachers were selected with the goal of not having speakers who were all of the same basic demographic. Therefore three of the preachers are Americans who are more widely known, two of whom are authors of books used in the research of this thesis. The other two preachers are pastors of local churches from eastern Canada. For this analysis, four sermons from each speaker were examined. A total of twenty-six objects were used in the sermons. They had a wide diversity and displayed great creativity. Not all of the objects were able to be held in the hand. In fact, some were quite large, including a section of a wall, a very long rope, a stationary bike, a giant “I” and a sheep pen.

An examination of the timing of when the objects were utilized during the sermon revealed that most (57%) came in the central part of the message. However 35% (9 objects) were used to begin a message and 8% (2 objects) helped to bring a message to a close. A potential tendency or pattern was also noticed in each preacher. For Gordon MacLeod and Francis Chan, the objects consistently showed up in the second half of the sermon, while the other three preachers always employed the visuals in the first half of the sermon. This wasn't surprising with Rick Blackwood, who writes in his book, "It has been my experience that multisensory communication grabs attention if used early in the sermon."<sup>196</sup> Interestingly, four of the objects used by Andy Stanley were used to start his message.

Most of the objects were linked to a single idea in a sermon. However, 35% of them (9 objects) were tied to the whole message and repeatedly referred to in connection with the sermon's main idea. Once again, tendencies among the preachers could be seen. The objects of two of the preachers were always singular illustrations, while the usual practice of two of the other speakers was to use the object to span the entire sermon.

The five preachers all seemed to understand the importance of ensuring the item displayed to the congregation could be seen sufficiently, either because of its size or with the help of a projection screen. In the twenty sermons, it was rare for a preacher to try to use an object which was difficult for the audience to see. Of the twenty-six objects, only two of them had enough visibility challenges to be an issue.

The objects used in the sermons focused on four different purposes: helping with understanding, capturing attention, making it memorable, and proving a truth. To aid in

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<sup>196</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 50.

the analysis, each time a purpose was the primary goal of an object, it received two points, whereas a secondary purpose was awarded one point. While this involved some subjective judgements, it seems reasonable that the overall trends are reliable. The most common goal for the physical objects was to help people understand, with over half of the points (54%). Aiding with memory (22%) and capturing attention (17%) seemed to be purposes for which the visuals were occasionally utilized. The aim of proving a truth in the sermon with an object was quite rare among these preachers (6%).

Smoothness of delivery was consistent with all of the speakers. There was only one occasion when it was at all questionable. Clearly there had been good planning, and possibly practice, ahead of time in order to account for such seamless delivery. Also there was just one time when the visual was so strong that it likely became a distraction to the congregation. For that illustration, obvious shock was experienced when some pages were torn out of a Bible. No explanation or disclaimer was offered to ease people's discomfort, which seemed to result in an overall unsettled feeling in the room. In the end, the visual detracted from the point being made, and even the sermon as a whole.

When it comes to timing, a preacher generally has two choices. Either the idea can be verbalized with the object to follow or the object can come first as a way of introducing the idea. All five of the preachers being analyzed made use of both approaches. However, most of the time (65%), the speakers favoured allowing the object to explain or strengthen an idea which had been presented.

Clarity was not an issue with any of the preachers. Most of the time, it was easy to see the connection between the visual and the point being made. There were three

times, though, when a clear explanation was needed and provided. It made the difference between an effective illustration and simply an interruption in the sermon.

In an attempt to give an overall impression of the effectiveness of each illustration using a physical object, a grading scale of four was utilized. This was not only based on presentation, but also on the following questions:

- Did it adequately serve the point it was supposed to be supporting?
- Did its presence have an impact or did it come out of nowhere and then disappear leaving one thinking, “What did that actually accomplish?”
- Did it help strengthen the Big Idea of the sermon?

A grade of one meant the visual was “not very effective.” A two was for those visuals which were deemed “moderately effective.” Three out of four was given when the illustration was “quite effective” and a perfect four meant that it had been “very effective.” All five of the preachers scored strongly. 84% of the visuals were either “quite effective” or “very effective” (42% each). At the other end of the scale, only one of the twenty-six objects (4%) fell under the designation of “not very effective.”

This analysis proved to be a useful tool in that it demonstrated that the guidelines offered in this chapter are not too difficult to follow. Much of the time, adhering to these principles simply requires some discipline, common sense and a commitment to the goal of seeing people’s lives changed through well-crafted sermons. This analysis was also helpful in those rare instances when the preachers did not do what these guidelines recommend. The potential negative results which can arise from such choices were clear to see. Finally, in the context of these sermons, it was noticeable how the use of physical objects elevated the power of the message being proclaimed.

## G. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the Bible does not prohibit the use of physical objects in preaching and actually encourages such an approach through its many examples, there are still people who question whether such an emphasis on the visual is actually appropriate in the context of sermons. Some believe that the current weight given to visuals actually leads to idolatry and the disintegration of society. However, many significant preachers in Church history have demonstrated that visuals placed alongside the spoken word can be used very effectively by God. From its birth, the Church has been called to walk the fine line between the dangers of irrelevancy and compromise. It would appear that today's preachers have the task of communicating God's truth with the help of visuals in a way which by no means alters the core message of the Gospel.

There are people, eager to protect the dignity and beauty of the worship experience, who deem physical objects in the message as unfitting. The pages of Scripture, though, appear to suggest that God is more concerned with effective communication of his truth than with "dignity." Both experience and scientific studies are demonstrating that visuals help people of all ages learn more efficiently. But do objects cheapen and trivialize the truth of God's Word? Not necessarily, since the use of visuals is a matter of style, not content. Both keen rhetorical skills and visual elements in a sermon can be either misused or utilized greatly to glorify God. Like all the other elements, physical objects are appropriate only when they serve the truth of the sermon.

While the power of the spoken word would be difficult to deny, preaching has an even greater impact when the verbal is combined with the visual. This has been confirmed in scientific studies. The more senses which are employed in the learning

process, the better the results of the teaching, especially in the areas of attention, comprehension and retention. Visuals are also great tools in helping bridge differences caused by culture, age and economic disparity.

This does not mean that including physical objects in a sermon is easy. In order for preachers to use them, they will often need to battle against their fear, apathy, comfort level, training and schedule. While this is difficult, with so much at stake, it would seem that such an effort is not only appropriate for today's preachers, but also necessary.

A number of approaches can be employed when using objects. They can be a potent way to either begin or end a sermon. The visual can be attached to a single idea or be connected to the entire message. Another option is to have multiple objects, with one linked to each of the main points. An object could come from the Bible text, the room itself, or any other source the preacher can imagine. The important thing is that it should be simple, fresh, visible and clearly related to the idea it's illustrating.

There are several guidelines that can be helpful to the one who is using physical objects. Good preparation and practice are essential. The length of time objects will be exposed to the audience should be thought through, balancing potential distraction with building suspense. A similar decision will need to be made regarding how often objects are used. Explanation must always accompany the visual so that its connection to the idea is clear. Finally, it is important that the visual illustration always remain audience-focused.

In an analysis of twenty sermons delivered by five different preachers, the importance of the principles offered for choosing and using physical objects was demonstrated. It was also evident that the guidelines are both reasonable and not too

complicated to follow. In addition, it showed how visual elements added to the overall effectiveness of the messages.

Based on research from a wide range of books and articles on homiletics, as well as input from the areas of rhetoric, education and science, it would seem reasonable to conclude that using physical objects in a sermon is both appropriate as well as the most effective method when preaching truth from God's Word to today's audience.

Blackwood sums it up this way: "You can be an expository teacher but not multisensory. Or, you can be a multisensory teacher but not expositional. What a shame that we hamstring our effectiveness with such unbiblical legalism on both sides. Let's connect these two God-given forces so that we can be more effective for the kingdom's sake."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Blackwood, *Power*, 87.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE PROJECT: A SEMINAR FOR PREACHERS**

In the first chapter of this thesis, one of the challenges facing today's preachers was described. Much of the world has grown significantly oriented toward the visual. The explosive growth of sight-based media, such as television, movies, smart phones and computers, has changed the way that people perceive the world around them. For most people, the image has gained a place of predominance over the spoken and printed word. At the same time, there have been developments in the understanding of how people learn. Studies have revealed that people have different learning styles, and the hearing-focused style is only one of them. Additionally, no matter what one's learning style is, evidence shows that there is increased learning with a multisensory teaching approach.

The challenge for preachers is that sermons have traditionally been an oral activity, aimed primarily at the ears of the congregation. This, of course, worked quite well in cultures which were strongly oriented to listening and/or reading. However, in light of the changes in society which are explained above, do sermons today need to be delivered in a different way? Do preachers need to find methods that enable their messages to be more multisensory? The evidence described in chapters two and three of this thesis would strongly suggest that sermons do need to change in order to be more effective.

The project which has been chosen to partner with this thesis is a three-hour seminar in which pertinent material from the research will be presented. The list of approximately 70 people to be invited to the seminar includes pastors, educators, office and community development staff of the Association of Rwandan Baptist Churches (AEBR), people involved in church leadership development, homiletics students, etc. [see Appendix 4 for

the invitation]. In effect, any English-speaking person known by the author will be welcome. Among those invited will be Rwandans, Canadians, Americans, as well as people from numerous other countries. The seminar will be taking place in Kigali, Rwanda, and it will be a multi-cultural event. The goal of this seminar is to use the material studied in order to show why using physical objects in sermons should be practiced and how best to do it.

While the seminar will be presented in English, for many of the people attending English is not their first language. That has affected the choice of vocabulary, examples, and presentation style. Effort has been made to use words and examples which will be more easily understood. In the presentation, even though PowerPoint could be used, the decision was made to have a “low-tech” approach. Physical objects, however, will be utilized at numerous points in the seminar, in a variety of ways. This will be done not only to aid in the point being taught, but also to demonstrate to the participants, over the course of the seminar, the diverse ways in which physical objects can be used.

The physical objects to be included in the presentation will take on different forms. Whiteboards will be used to list Scripture references of verses which will be read (to speed up the process of looking up verses). Key words will be written down as the presentation progresses. The whiteboards will also be useful for diagrams to help visualize points being taught or answer questions from participants. A homemade Exultet Roll [see Appendix 1] will be demonstrated to help those attending picture a concept which will probably be new to them. According to prior arrangement, one attendee is “spontaneously” going to go to the front of the room to plug in his phone while the teaching is happening in order to illustrate how eyes are naturally attracted to

movement. Several common items will also be a part of the teaching, including a small flag, a light bulb, a large bottle of glue, a 5000 Rwandan Francs bill, and a die.

The presentation has three distinct phases. The first is entitled “Looking into the Bible.” Since preaching is fundamentally a spiritual activity, it is important that a discussion focused on this subject begin by laying a biblical/theological foundation.

Everyone who has been invited is already involved in ministry of some type. They will accept and expect the Bible to be the starting point. The material for this portion of the presentation is gleaned from chapter two of this thesis and follows the same structure: Visuals and God’s Self-Revelation, Visuals and the Old Testament, and Visuals and the New Testament.

The second phase of the presentation moves into the justification of the use of physical objects in preaching (beyond the biblical/theological reasons). This phase is called “Why Physical Objects Should be Used” and is based on section B of chapter three, “Issues Surrounding the Appropriateness of the Use of Objects in Sermons.” This material is centred around six key questions that need to be discussed in order to evaluate adequately the use of objects in sermons.

The last phase of the seminar is entitled “How Physical Objects Should be Used.” Having established the importance of using objects when preaching (i.e. Why use objects), the final phase of the presentation moves into the practical issues of when to use objects in a sermon, what objects can be used in a sermon, and how to use the objects in a sermon. Each of these subjects is discussed through the use of various guidelines. This material is gleaned from sections C, D and E of chapter three.

The material in this chapter is in three sections. The first is the curriculum which will be taught. These pages would be considered the “teacher’s notes.” They are presented in point form as they will be used on the day of the seminar. When a physical object is to be included in the teaching, it has been noted in square brackets using type that is both bold and in italics.

The second section is the handout which will be given to each one attending. While it does not include everything that is in the “teacher’s notes,” it has all of the basic information. The handout has several purposes. During the presentation, it will allow the people to follow along more easily. This is especially important for those whose mother tongue is not English. As a result, people can give their attention to thinking about what is being presented rather than trying to write it all down quickly. It also provides them with a place to make further notes as they listen. Following the presentation, they can each take their notes home with them. This is important because some of the material will be covered less thoroughly than others. The notes will make it easier for participants to follow-up at a later time if there were aspects of the seminar which they want to investigate further. The notes have another advantage. For the Rwandans attending, the reality is that many of them have few resources in the way of books, journals, etc. Any resources which can be put in their hands are always both valued and appreciated.

The final section of this chapter is the feedback tool which has been prepared. It is an evaluation which the participants will be asked to complete at the end of the seminar. With the language challenges particularly in mind, it was designed to be mostly multiple choice questions. However there are a few places which require some writing. In

addition to the general information, the form asks a couple of questions about each of the sections of the presentation as well as some questions on the seminar as a whole.

### **A. Curriculum for the Seminar**

#### **What You See Is What You Get**

Presentation on Homiletics (Preaching) for Completion of DMin Studies  
Rev. Darrell Bustin

- There is little disagreement over whether or not a change has taken place in the communication patterns of the world. Whichever way we turn, it is clear that we have entered a visual era. What is not so clear is how the Church is to respond to this change.
- In addition, there has been a growing emphasis on multisensory teaching as the most effective approach.
- What is the Church to do? Should it join in and become actively visual in the way it communicates God's truth, or should it be different, resisting this current trend in society? How are those who have been called to be communicators of God's Word to react to the direction in which our world is going?

#### LOOKING INTO THE BIBLE

- In order to sort through this issue, the best place to start is in the Bible. Does Scripture give us any commands or principles that would answer these questions? Are there any examples that would be helpful to notice?
- We are going to approach the Bible from three different perspectives:
  - What can we learn from God's revelation of himself?
  - What can we learn from the Old Testament?
  - What can we learn from the New Testament?

## Visuals and God's Self-Revelation

### 1. Word-based Religion

- God chose to reveal himself in a Word-based religious system in stark contrast to the idolatry of other religions at the time.
- The truth that was presented had to be absolutely clear.
- God used the written word to communicate with human beings:
  - ◆ With Moses, the Decalogue ("Ten Words") was written by the finger of God and stored in the Ark of the Covenant.
  - ◆ No image was ever to be worshiped. (This was a constant struggle.)
  - ◆ The culture of the Israelites focused on the Holy Scriptures.
  - ◆ Jesus, God's Son, was actually called the Word (John 1).

### 2. Multisensory Revelation

- It is true that trying to represent God visually or worshipping other visually-depicted deities was forbidden. However, in the Bible there are many examples of God's revelation which included elements of the visual.
- General Revelation
  - ◆ Creation constantly declares God's glory without words (Ps 19:1-3). To reject its message is to fall under condemnation (Rom 1:20).
  - ◆ Humans are described as being in the "image" of God (Gen 1:26-27).
- Special Revelation (Scripture)
  - ◆ Even while God wrote his commands on the tablets, including the ones prohibiting idols, he displayed himself through fire, smoke and earthquake (Exod 19:17-19).
- Special Revelation (Incarnation)
  - ◆ Many times the New Testament says that seeing Jesus is the same as seeing the Father (John 12:45; 14:9; Heb 1:3; Col 1:15).
  - ◆ Jesus was the Word. Christianity, like Judaism, was word-dependent. But he became visible in order to be seen (John 1:14)!

- ◆ God the Father confirmed the identity and mission of his Son through both sight and sound (Jesus' birth, baptism, transfiguration and resurrection).

### Visuals and the Old Testament

- In the Old Testament, the prominent verbal message was often strengthened and reinforced using visual tools.
1. God's Use of Visuals
    - God had the freedom to choose any method he wanted, plus he knows best how people learn. So how did he choose to communicate?
    - Even though God himself remained only a voice, his teaching included visuals.
    - He taught visually through instructions.
      - ◆ The Passover was a visual feast (Exod 12:8-11, 20, 26-27).
      - ◆ The Tabernacle was filled with visual lessons: ark, table, bread, lamp, curtain, altar, garments, incense, basin (Exod 25-30).
    - He taught visually through miracles.
      - ◆ The contest on Mount Carmel with Elijah (1 Kgs 18)
      - ◆ The confirmation of Hezekiah's healing (2 Kgs 20:8-11)
    - He taught visually through visions
      - ◆ Confirmation of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:8-10, 12, 17-18)
      - ◆ With his prophets: Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones (Ezek 37:1-14); plus Daniel, Amos and Zechariah
  2. People's Use of Visuals
    - Many of Lord's prophets also used visuals to communicate their messages, often at the express command of God.
    - Some practiced the Show-and-Tell Method, where an object was used in connection with the truth they were preaching.
      - ◆ Moses, Samuel and Elijah used oil when they anointed priests (Exod 30:30), kings (1 Sam 16:13) and prophets (1 Kgs 19:16).

- ◆ Joshua piled stones to remind people of events (Josh 4:5-8; 4:9; 8:30-32; 24:26-27).
- ◆ Ahijah tore his cloak (1 Kgs 11:29-31).
- ◆ Jeremiah used a linen belt (Jer 13), a potter (Jer 18), a broken pot (19:10-11), buried stones (43:9-10), and a scroll (51:61, 63-64).
- ◆ Zechariah made a crown for the high priest (Zech 6:11-12).
- ◆ Ezekiel used rods and signposts (Ezek 21) and sticks (37:15-19).
- Some practiced the Dramatization Method, which usually meant that the speaker was the “object” or one of the objects used.
  - ◆ Isaiah went without clothes (Isa 20:2-5).
  - ◆ Jeremiah wore a yoke (Jer 27:2-3, 12).
  - ◆ Ezekiel built a model of Jerusalem and lay beside it, additionally using hair, a sword and food to teach his lesson (Ezek 4 and 5). He also dug through a wall and went through the hole (Ezek 12).
- Some practiced the Real-life Sermon Method, when an actual event in the prophet’s life was used to provide a visual lesson.
  - ◆ Jeremiah redeemed a relative’s field (Jer 32:15).
  - ◆ Isaiah gave a unique name to his new son (Isa 8:1-4).
  - ◆ Ezekiel didn’t mourn over his wife’s death (Ezek 24:15-18).
  - ◆ Hosea married a prostitute (Hos 1:2), gave unique names to his children (Hos 1:3-9) and redeemed back his unfaithful wife (Hos 3:1-3).
- God’s choice in the Old Testament to use both verbal and visual messages makes a strong, positive statement about the use of visuals in today’s preaching.

### Visuals and the New Testament

- Does the relationship between seeing and hearing change in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus?
1. Jesus’ Use of Visuals
    - It appears that Jesus felt it was necessary, or at the very least more effective, to help people learn by using visuals.
    - Jesus used objects from nature



- ◆ Fig tree (Mark 11)
- ◆ Mountain (Matt 17:20)
- ◆ Water (John 4:13-14)
- ◆ Mulberry bush (Luke 17:6)
- ◆ Birds and lilies (Matt 6:26, 28) – He probably meant “look at” not “reflect upon.”
- ◆ Fields (John 4:35)
- Jesus used human-made objects
  - ◆ Coin (Matt 22:17-21)
  - ◆ Temple (Matt 24:2)
  - ◆ Wine and bread (Matt 26:26-28)
- Jesus used people as visuals
  - ◆ Poor widow (Mark 12)
  - ◆ Peter and Andrew as fishermen (Mark 1:16-17)
  - ◆ Zaccheus (Luke 19:10)
  - ◆ Prostitute washing his feet (Luke 7:44-50)
  - ◆ Children (Matt 18:1-4; Mark 10)
  - ◆ Himself: Triumphal Entry (John 12:12-15); cleansing the temple (Matt 21:12-13); washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:14-15); proof of the resurrection (Luke 24:36-42)
- Jesus used “nature” or “general” miracles
  - ◆ Guidance for fishing (Luke 5:4; John 21:6)
  - ◆ Feeding 5000 families (Matt 14:13-21) and 4000 families (Matt 15:29-39)
  - ◆ Calming the storm (Mark 4:39; Matt 14:25-31)
- Jesus cast out demons
  - ◆ Man in synagogue (Mark 1:27)
  - ◆ Boy (Mark 9:16-27)
  - ◆ Man in Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20)

- Jesus used physical healings
  - ◆ If it was only compassion that motivated Jesus' healings, he could have instantly cured all the sick people in a single moment.
  - ◆ The primary purpose seems to be providing a visual confirmation that his teaching had authority or a demonstration of the truth he was teaching.
  - ◆ Ex. the man with the shrivelled hand (Luke 6:8)
  - ◆ Sometimes, in addition to the miracle, Jesus included an extra visual element such as mud (John 9:6) or his saliva (Mark 8:22-23).
- Jesus used touch
  - ◆ Jesus' long-distance healings demonstrate that it was not necessary for him to touch the sick or dead people in order to heal them: centurion's servant (Matt 8); Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt 15); royal official's son (John 4).
  - ◆ Jesus often used touch as a visual cue that the healing was from him.
  - ◆ Leper (Luke 5)
  - ◆ Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8:15)
  - ◆ Blind men (Matt 9:29; 20:34)
  - ◆ Deaf and mute man (Mark 7:32-35)
  - ◆ Stooped woman (Luke 13:10-13)
  - ◆ Man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)
  - ◆ Dead young man (Luke 7:14-15)
  - ◆ Jairus' dead daughter (Luke 8:51-54)

## 2. The Importance of Sight for Jesus' Witnesses

- The credibility of the Gospel record rested, in large part, upon what had been personally seen by people.
  - ◆ Luke (Luke 1:1-2; Acts 1:3)
  - ◆ Replacement of Judas (Acts 1:21-22)
  - ◆ Peter (Acts 4:20; 13:31; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:16)
  - ◆ Paul (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8)
  - ◆ John (John 1:14; 19:35; 1 John 1:1; 4:14)

- The Bible recognizes that people are more likely to believe if they see the proof. Rather than being displeased, it seems that God chose to use the visual to prove the Gospel's trustworthiness.

### 3. The Book of Revelation: The Final Vision from God

- The last book of the Bible is very visually oriented. Not only does its name emphasize what is seen, but it is filled from start to finish with visions.
- Chapters four and five exalt the Son of God in what could only be described as a multisensory worship extravaganza!

### Conclusion from the Biblical Evidence

- Based on what is found in Scripture, the following principles can be stated:
  - God's people are forbidden from trying to render God in visual form or worship the image of other false gods.
  - God's revelation to humankind gives emphasis to the spoken and written word. It is a unique, word-based religion.
  - At the same time, Scripture does not forbid the use of visuals to strengthen the word-based message. In fact, it could be said that it encourages, maybe even expects, such a practice.

### WHY PHYSICAL OBJECTS SHOULD BE USED

- There are six key questions surrounding the issue of whether or not physical objects should be used in the context of sermons.
  1. Are they appropriate for Christian teaching?
    - Some feel that the change in society toward the emphasis on the visual is dangerous. They believe that it is pushing people away from the Gospel toward a mindless, idolatrous paganism. They are convinced that it is wrong for the church to join in with this trend.
    - In Church history, there have been times when the visual was elevated (ex. the Middle Ages) but also times when its opponents sought to destroy all visual elements in worship (ex. the Reformation). However, generally, visual

approaches to teaching God's truth have been positively regarded, with many famous examples: St. Patrick, St. John of Damascus, St. Francis of Assisi, John Wesley, George Whitefield and Henry Ward Beecher.

- Based on Scripture and history, there are people who feel that the Church must respond by becoming more visual, or its demise will follow. In other words, it must find a way to walk the fine line between “contextualization” and “compromise” in order to reach people today.

## 2. Are they appropriate for teaching adults?

- Some believe that an approach to teaching that includes visual elements is fitting for youth and children but not adults. In many cases, this is due to a desire to protect the “dignity” of worship.
- While the temple regulations in the Old Testament remind people always to treat God as holy, the way that he had his prophets get across their message indicates that communication was a higher priority to God than “dignity” (cf. 2 Sam 6:20-23).
- Both experience and scientific studies indicate that teaching involving sight is more effective for adults as well as children.
- The church of the Middle Ages knew this instinctively. Their church buildings and worship were full of visual cues for worshipers. (Ex. Exultet Rolls) [*visual – show example of Exultet Roll*]
- Today's believers must not let “historical snobbery” quickly dismiss such approaches.

## 3. Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?

- Sometimes visuals in a sermon are accused of being mindless entertainment which waters down the truth of the Gospel.
- But it is inaccurate to imply that any method besides lecture must be considered entertainment. The fact is that the use of teaching which aims at multiple senses is not only biblical, it also engages the mind on multiple levels.

- It is true that there are preachers who misuse this technique, even as other preachers at times misuse rhetorical skills and methods. Trivializing the message is an issue of substance, not style.
- Content (biblical accuracy) and clarity (technique), while connected, are still two different matters.

4. Is verbal communication alone the most effective method for a sermon?

- In Acts and Paul's letters, there is an unmistakable emphasis on preaching as a verbal event. Ex. Rom 10:14, 17 – "Faith comes by hearing the message..."
- It should be understood that the discussion about the use of objects in sermons is not a question of using only words versus only visuals. Rather, are words by themselves more effective than words supported by visual elements?
- Hearing and seeing each have areas of strength which complement one another. The printed and spoken word is processed by the left side of the brain which specializes in logic, sequence and categories. Pictures, on the other hand, are dealt with by the right side of the brain which specializes in intuition and perceiving the full picture all at one time.
- It is therefore not surprising that studies confirm that verbal communication on its own is not the most effective approach to preaching. Those studies demonstrate that learning activity in the brain increases when teaching includes visual elements.

5. Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?

- There are people who promote the idea that using physical objects in a sermon is unnecessary, that they are simply gimmicks that some preachers resort to. They claim that words are sufficient.
- However, this seems deliberately to ignore the different God-given learning styles which are reflected in 1 John 1:1—hearing, seeing and interacting. But most churches recognize only one style—hearing. If that is not your best way of learning, you just have to struggle along.
- But if there is not a theological reason for avoiding it, the preaching that makes the most sense is multisensory preaching. Not only does it naturally

include a greater proportion of every congregation, but it also increases everyone's likelihood of learning. By "transmitting" using both the "eye channel" and the "ear channel" there is a far greater chance for the brain to receive accurately the information.

- One study concluded that "a 'typical' presenter using visuals can be as effective as a 'better' presenter using no visuals."
- How exactly do visuals improve a sermon? Here are "the Big Three" benefits:

I. ATTENTION – Gaining and maintaining people's attention during a sermon is not a peripheral issue. [*visual – demonstration by having someone walk up and plug in phone at the front in the middle of the talk*] A sermon must be true but it must also be engaging or people don't hear it. Objects help because the eye is attracted to motion, brightness and colour. [*visual – flag*] It is like waving a flag. Additionally, boredom is often caused by "communication predictability." Visuals add the unexpected to the sermon.

II. COMPREHENSION – It is possible for a sermon to be true while not being understandable. Physical objects can help with this in several ways. They can take an abstract idea and quickly make it concrete and vivid. [*visual – light bulb*] It is as if a light comes on and they can see clearly. Visuals can also help people more easily grasp things from the culture and time of the Bible stories.

III. RETENTION - The people in the congregation will not be able to use the truth of God's Word in their lives if they can't remember it. Physical objects that are seen are imprinted in people's memories. [*visual – glue bottle*] They are like glue that helps the truth stick in their minds.

- Besides "the Big Three," there are other benefits in supporting one's sermon visually:

IV. TRUST – People tend to trust their eyes more than their ears (cf. Job 42:5-6). In the case of "mixed messages," such as encountering hypocritical people, we believe what we see them doing more than what we hear them saying. When visuals are used alongside the

verbal message, studies show that people are more likely to believe what is being presented simply because it involves their eyes.

V. BRIDGING GAPS – Visuals have an ability to overcome “generational gaps” (differences between different age groups) since they appeal to all ages. In the challenging environment of multiple cultures, physical objects have a way of connecting with everyone. They also work well in churches ministering in any economic situation, whether a wealthy North American church or a small, poor congregation in a developing nation (unlike high tech visual methods).

VI. VISUAL LEARNERS – Studies have shown that significant exposure of young children to television, computers, etc. actually affects the neurological development of their brains. In other words, many of the young people in our congregations actually require teaching that includes visual elements in order to learn effectively. If they have no choice in the way their brain works, it stands to reason that the preacher should try to connect with them through visuals.

#### 6. Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

- If there are so many solid reasons for including visuals in sermons, why do so many preachers not use them? There seem to be several causes:
  - Indifference – Unfortunately there are preachers who simply don’t care enough to make the effort to change. They consider their sermons “good enough.” But they could easily elevate good teaching to great teaching with objects.
  - Tradition – Some people fear the criticism of trying anything not customary. This criticism could come either from some church members or from denominational leaders.
  - Style – Many claim that using visuals is simply “not their style.” But preaching is not about me and what I like. Are we willing to step outside what is comfortable for us if it means we can connect with the hearts of our listeners?

- Habit – It is easy for preachers to adopt one style and then never change, grow or learn from others in their preaching approach.
- Time – When a preacher is stressed or busy, it is easiest to resort back to the familiar while creativity is pushed aside. But the people in our congregations are desperately in need of God's truth, presented in the best possible way.

## HOW PHYSICAL OBJECTS SHOULD BE USED

### Various Ways in which Physical Objects Can Be Employed in Sermons

- One of the important aspects of visuals that needs to be understood is their flexibility. They can be used in many different ways to help strengthen a sermon.
  1. Start a sermon with an object.
    - ↳ This helps grab the audience's attention right from the beginning.
  2. Use an object throughout an entire sermon.
    - ↳ This provides a common thread which helps tie the message together.
  3. Connect an object to a particular truth.
    - ↳ This gives strength and clarity to what is said.
  4. Attach one object to each major point of the sermon.
    - ↳ This assists the audience in following the overall direction of the message more easily.
  5. Finish the sermon with an object as part of the climax.
    - ↳ This helps people take the final idea home with them.

### Guidelines for Choosing Objects for a Sermon

- Selecting the right object is an important decision. Good choices enhance a sermon, but poor choices diminish a sermon's effectiveness. The preacher must choose wisely.
- These are some guidelines which can help the preacher find the best objects:
  1. Look for objects mentioned in the biblical text.
  2. Consider using objects which you were going to refer to in a verbal illustration.

**[visual - 5000 Rwf bill]**



3. Keep it simple, especially at first. It reduces the potential of problems.
4. The physical object must be visible to the congregation in order to be effective.  
[*visual – a die*]
5. Sometimes a visual can be created by the preacher during the message, such as a drawing or chart.
6. It is possible for the preacher to refer to objects in the room which are always visible, but perhaps not noticed.
7. With experience, the stage/platform can be designed with visual cues connected to the theme of the message.
8. First-person narrative sermons can include full costume. But it can also be powerful simply to use a “single-item costume.” (Ex. sling for David; Moses with a staff)
9. Usually it is best to avoid animals and children since their unpredictability might draw too much attention and become more of a distraction from the sermon.
10. Dangerous or illegal objects should never be used.
11. Lean toward choosing objects which are fresh and unexpected instead of predictable.
12. Make certain there is a clear connection between the object and the truth being taught.

#### Guidelines for Using Objects in Sermons

- While choosing the right object is very important, it doesn’t guarantee effectiveness. How we use the object also has an impact.
- The following observations can provide some direction in this area:
  1. Good preparation is important.
    - ↪ This involves gathering, finding, organizing, possibly even making the object.
    - ↪ This also includes practice to ensure its use goes smoothly, not only helping with confidence but also identifying possible logistical problems.
    - ↪ Give some thought to a back-up plan if something goes wrong.
  2. Length of exposure of the object must be considered.
    - ↪ There are two perspectives on this issue:
      - a. Limit the time the object is visible so that it doesn’t become a distraction and a competitor for attention.
      - b. An object that is visible before it is used creates curiosity and interest.

- ↪ Be aware of this issue and make a careful decision.
- 3. Remain audience-focused.
  - ↪ Maintain good eye-contact with the audience while using the object.
  - ↪ Avoid long periods of silence during the time you are using the visual.
- 4. Always give the necessary explanation.
  - ↪ Showing an object is never enough. Make certain the connection is clear.
- 5. Never pass the object around.
  - ↪ While you keep speaking, the object becomes a distraction to all those around it.
- 6. Frequency of the use of physical objects needs to be thought through.
  - ↪ There are two perspectives on this issue:
    - a. Physical objects should be limited, only being used periodically or they will lose their effectiveness.
    - b. Physical objects should be employed at every appropriate opportunity, provided they are used in a variety of ways.

## CONCLUSION

- There are many factors which spur today's preacher toward the use of physical objects in a sermon. There are biblical reasons, scientific reasons as well as experience. It seems abundantly clear that this simple step can elevate the effectiveness of any message.
- That leaves us with the question of what our next step will be as preachers. Despite habits, fears, traditions or busyness, for the sake of our listeners, are we willing to embrace what may be for us a new approach to preaching? With the help of practical guidelines and ideas, are we ready to make visual elements a part of our sermons? If we are, then we better be prepared. The evidence strongly suggests that our congregations will thank us—while being transformed by the truth of God's Word.

## **B. Handout for Seminar Participants**

### **What You See Is What You Get**

Presentation on Homiletics (Preaching) for Completion of DMin Studies

Rev. Darrell Bustin

- A change has taken place in the communication patterns of the world. We have entered a visual era.
- In addition, there is a growing emphasis on the effectiveness of multisensory teaching.
- How is the Church to respond to this change? How are those of us who have been called to be communicators of God's Word to react? Should we join in and become actively visual or should we be different, resisting this current trend in society?

### LOOKING INTO THE BIBLE

- Does Scripture give any commands or principles that would answer these questions?

### Visuals and God's Self-Revelation

#### 1. Word-based Religion

- God chose to reveal himself in a Word-based religious system in stark contrast to other religions.
- God used the written word to communicate with human beings:
  - ◆ With Moses, the Decalogue ("Ten Words") was written by God.
  - ◆ No image was ever to be worshiped.
  - ◆ Jesus, God's Son, was actually called the Word (John 1).

#### 2. Multisensory Revelation

- However, there are many examples of God's revelation which included elements of the visual.
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  - ◆ Creation declares God's glory without words (Ps 19:1-3).
  - ◆ Humans are created in the "image" of God (Gen 1:26-27).
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  - ◆ On Sinai, God displayed himself through fire, smoke and earthquake (Exod 19:17-19).

- Special Revelation (Incarnation)
  - ◆ Seeing Jesus is the same as seeing the Father (John 12:45; 14:9; Heb 1:3).
  - ◆ Jesus was called the Word. But he became visible in order to be seen (John 1:14)!
  - ◆ Jesus' identity and mission were confirmed by both sight and sound (Jesus' birth, baptism, transfiguration and resurrection).

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- The last book of the Bible is filled from start to finish with visions.
- Chapters four and five exalt the Son of God in what could only be described as a multisensory worship extravaganza!

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- Both experience and scientific studies indicate that teaching involving sight is more effective for adults as well as children.
- The church of the Middle Ages knew this. (Ex. church buildings, worship, Exultet Rolls)

3. Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?

- Are visuals mindless entertainment which waters down the Gospel?

- It is inaccurate to imply that any method besides lecture must be considered entertainment. Teaching which aims at multiple senses is not only biblical, it also engages the mind on multiple levels.
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- This is not a question of using only words vs. only visuals. Are words by themselves more effective than words supported by visual elements?
- Hearing and seeing each have areas of strength which complement one another.
- Studies confirm that learning activity in the brain increases when teaching includes visual elements.

5. Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?

- Are physical objects in a sermon unnecessary? Are they simply gimmicks?
- 1 John 1:1 reflects the different God-given learning styles—hearing, seeing and interacting. But most churches recognize only one style—hearing.
- But multisensory preaching "transmits" using both the "eye channel" and the "ear channel" so there is a far greater chance for the brain to receive accurately the information.
- "A 'typical' presenter using visuals can be as effective as a 'better' presenter using no visuals."
- "The Big Three" Benefits

I. ATTENTION – Objects help because the eye is attracted to motion, brightness and colour. Additionally, visuals add the unexpected to the sermon.



II. COMPREHENSION – Physical objects can take an abstract idea and quickly make it concrete and vivid. Visuals can also help people grasp things from the culture and time of the Bible stories.

III. RETENTION - Physical objects that are seen are imprinted in people's memories. They are like glue that helps the truth stick in their minds.

➤ Other benefits in supporting one's sermon visually:

IV. TRUST – People tend to trust their eyes more than their ears (cf. Job 42:5-6). They are therefore more likely to believe what is being presented simply because it involves their eyes.

V. BRIDGING GAPS – Visuals have an ability to overcome “generational gaps”, multicultural environments, as well as diverse economic situations.

VI. VISUAL LEARNERS – Many of the young people in our congregations actually require teaching that includes visual elements in order to learn effectively.

6. Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

- Indifference – There are preachers who simply don't care enough to change. They consider their sermons “good enough.”
- Tradition – Some people fear the criticism of trying anything not customary.
- Style – Many claim that using visuals is simply “not their style.” But preaching is not about me and what I like.
- Habit – It is easy for preachers to adopt one style and then never change.
- Time – When a preacher is stressed or busy, it is easiest to resort back to the familiar while creativity is pushed aside.

## HOW PHYSICAL OBJECTS SHOULD BE USED

### Various Ways in which Physical Objects Can Be Employed in Sermons

- Physical objects are very flexible. They can be used in many different ways to help strengthen a sermon.

1. Start a sermon with an object.
  - ↳ This helps grab the audience's attention right from the beginning.
2. Use an object throughout an entire sermon.
  - ↳ This provides a common thread which helps tie the message together.
3. Connect an object to a particular truth.
  - ↳ This gives strength and clarity to what is said.
4. Attach one object to each major point of the sermon.
  - ↳ This assists the audience in following the overall direction of the message.
5. Finish the sermon with an object as part of the climax.
  - ↳ This helps people take the final idea home with them.

#### Guidelines for Choosing Objects for a Sermon

- Selecting the right object is an important decision. Here are some guidelines:
  1. Look for objects mentioned in the biblical text.
  2. Turn a verbal illustration into a visual illustration.
  3. Keep it simple, especially at first.
  4. The physical object must be visible.
  5. Sometimes a visual can be created by the preacher during the message, such as a drawing or chart.
  6. Refer to objects already in the room.
  7. With experience, the stage/platform can be designed with visual cues.
  8. First-person narrative sermons can include full costume or a "single-item costume."  
(Ex. sling for David; Moses with a staff)
  9. Avoid using animals and children.
  10. Dangerous or illegal objects should never be used.
  11. Choose objects which are fresh and unexpected instead of predictable.
  12. Make certain there is a clear connection between the object and the truth.

### Guidelines for Using Objects in Sermons

- How we use the object also has an impact. The following observations can help:
  1. Good preparation is important.
    - ↳ Gathering, finding, organizing, possibly even making the object
    - ↳ Practice
    - ↳ Back-up plan
  2. Length of exposure of the object must be considered.
    - ↳ There are two perspectives on this issue:
      - a. Limit the time the object is visible so that it doesn't become a distraction.
      - b. An object that is visible before it is used creates curiosity and interest.
    - ↳ Be aware of this issue and make a careful decision.
  3. Remain audience-focused.
    - ↳ Maintain good eye-contact.
    - ↳ Avoid long periods of silence.
  4. Always give the necessary explanation.
  5. Never pass the object around.
  6. Frequency of the use of physical objects needs to be thought through.
    - ↳ There are two perspectives on this issue:
      - a. Physical objects should only be used periodically.
      - b. Physical objects should be used at every appropriate opportunity, provided they are used in a variety of ways.

### CONCLUSION

- There are biblical reasons, scientific reasons as well as experience which make it abundantly clear that the use of physical objects can elevate the effectiveness of any message.
- The question is “What is our next step as preachers?” Despite habits, fears, traditions or busyness, for the sake of our listeners, are we willing to embrace what may be for us a new approach to preaching?

### C. Seminar Evaluation Form to be Used by Participants

#### PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM

**Seminar: What You See Is What You Get**

**Date: December, 10, 2016**

#### Personal Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 20-29  
☐ 30-39  
☐ 40-49  
☐ 50-59  
☐ 60+
3. Nationality: ☐ Rwandan  
☐ African from a country besides Rwanda  
☐ Canadian  
☐ American  
☐ From a country in Europe
4. Current preaching activity: ☐ I usually preach at least once per week  
☐ I usually preach a couple of times each month  
☐ I usually preach about once per month  
☐ I preach a few times each year  
☐ I rarely or never preach
5. Do you believe that preaching is one of your spiritual gifts? ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not sure
6. If you regularly or occasionally preach, do you use physical objects in your sermons?  
☐ Yes, regularly  
☐ Yes, occasionally  
☐ Yes, but only rarely  
☐ No

#### Section 1: Looking into the Bible

7. How would you describe the part of the presentation on biblical evidence?  
☐ Informative and thorough  
☐ Difficult to understand  
☐ Good, but it didn't cover all the issues  
☐ Not helpful

8. Did you hear anything about the use of visuals in the Bible which was new for you?

☐ No

☐ Yes. Please describe what was new for you: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Section 2: Why Physical Objects Should Be Used

9. Which of the six key questions surrounding the use of objects in sermons was the most helpful or interesting for you?

- ☐ Are they appropriate for Christian teaching?
- ☐ Are they appropriate for teaching adults?
- ☐ Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?
- ☐ Is verbal communication alone the most effective method for a sermon?
- ☐ Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?
- ☐ Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

10. Which of the six questions was most difficult to understand or the least helpful to you?

- ☐ Are they appropriate for Christian teaching?
- ☐ Are they appropriate for teaching adults?
- ☐ Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?
- ☐ Is verbal communication alone the most effective method for a sermon?
- ☐ Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?
- ☐ Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

### Section 3: How Physical Objects Should Be Used

11. Please describe how useful the information on choosing and using objects was for you.

- ☐ I do not think it was helpful for me.
- ☐ Even though it was interesting, I have a hard time picturing me using objects when I preach.
- ☐ I'm not sure yet. I may need more time to think about it.
- ☐ The steps and guidelines will make it easier for me to try using visuals.

12. If you do not use physical objects when you preach, which of these reasons best describes why?

- ☐ Indifference - "My sermons are good enough without them."
- ☐ Tradition - "That's just not done in our church."
- ☐ Style - "That's not my style."
- ☐ Habit - "I've never done that before."
- ☐ Time - "Who has time for that?"
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Not applicable. I use physical objects when I preach.
- ☐ Not applicable. I never/almost never preach.

The Overall Presentation

13. Did the presenter seem to be knowledgeable of the subject?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ Only somewhat
- ☐ No

14. Were you able to understand what was being presented?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ Only somewhat
- ☐ No

15. Was there anything in the presentation that you disagreed with?

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16. If you regularly or occasionally preach, do you expect that you will use physical objects in your sermons in the future?

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, occasionally
- ☐ Yes, but only rarely
- ☐ No

17. From everything that you have heard in the presentation, what is the one idea that will be most helpful to you in your ministry, which you want to take home with you?

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## **D. Conclusion**

The motivation for writing this thesis was the desire to help those who have been called to preach God's Word to be able to do so more effectively through the use of physical objects. In choosing to lead a Preachers' Seminar for the project, one of the challenges has been to move from the academic realm to the practical realities of life. How does one take 120 pages of research and transform it into a three-hour seminar that is both understandable and useful for the preachers who attend? This has been further complicated by the fact that many of those attending do not speak English as their mother tongue.

As the material in chapters two and three was analyzed, the issues mentioned above became the deciding factors in what would be included in the presentation. Even if something is true, if the listener cannot understand what is being taught, the presentation is in vain. In the same way, knowledge that is not usable is of no benefit and the time at the seminar will be wasted. So the early part of the seminar will be spent establishing the biblical/philosophical reasoning behind the use of physical objects in preaching. The latter portion of the presentation will be focused on the basic "how to" questions that will make it easier for those attending to jump from the knowledge to the practice. If the seminar can be both credible as well as practical, it will be well on the way to achieving the desired goals.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

On December 10, 2016, a Preachers' Seminar entitled "What You See Is What You Get" was held in Kigali, Rwanda in order to fulfill the project requirements of this thesis-project. It took place at the office building of the Association of Baptist Churches of Rwanda (AEBR). With over seventy having been invited, the attendance of twenty-eight people seemed like a reasonably good turn-out for a three-hour Saturday morning presentation. The age range of the nineteen men and nine women present was spread evenly from the 20s through the 50s. Most of the people were Rwandese, along with five from Canada and two from Denmark. [For pictures of the event, see Appendix 5.]

During the seminar, the entire "Curriculum for the Seminar" described in chapter four was presented. Upon arrival, each person received a copy of the "Handout for Seminar Participants." This allowed the attendees to follow along with what was being taught as well as have material on the subject to take home with them. At the end, the participants were given a "Presentation Evaluation Form" which they were asked to complete before leaving. [For full evaluation results, see Appendix 6.]

In the evaluation, the participants indicated their current preaching activity, which varied greatly from person to person. Most of the people attending would be considered periodic preachers. Only three of the people preach at least once per week. Seven participants preach a couple of times per month while seventeen of them indicated that they only preach a few times per year. One person rarely or never preaches. Interestingly, even though there were only three who preach weekly, twenty-two of the



twenty-eight people at the seminar believe that preaching is one of their spiritual gifts. Of the other six people, three said that it was not their spiritual gift and three were unsure.

Since the topic of the seminar was the use of physical objects while preaching, it was important to establish the level at which objects were employed in sermons by those attending. In the evaluation form, most claimed that they do use them in some fashion, either regularly (four people), occasionally (eleven people) or rarely (four people). Eight of the participants stated that they basically never use physical objects while preaching.

The first topic to be covered at the seminar was the biblical and theological foundation. Most of the people (twenty-one) found this section to be informative and thorough. However, there was a small number who didn't see it in a totally positive light. Four people thought it was good but that it didn't cover all the issues surrounding this subject. There were two others who found it difficult to understand.

When asked if there was anything about the use of visuals in the Bible which was new to them, eight people answered "no." Of those who did hear something new from the Bible, four people had never before considered the "Real Life Sermon" method used by some of the prophets. Another person highlighted one of the other methods employed by the prophets—"Dramatization." Two people had never previously thought about the way God used visuals in the Old Testament, while two others mentioned Jesus' use of objects in the New Testament. Some people had more general answers to this question. There were two people who commented on the way they were given a new perspective on verses with which they were already familiar. One person was surprised at the amount that physical objects were used in both the Old and New Testaments.

It should be noted that, unfortunately, there were a number of people who misunderstood this question. They overlooked the phrase “the use of visuals in the Bible” and instead shared something new that they had learned from the entire seminar. Some of the things which were mentioned were the various guidelines, the “Big Three” benefits, and the Exultet Rolls from the Middle Ages.

The second major section of the presentation looked at the question of why physical objects should be used. There were six major questions that formed the basis of this block of teaching. In the evaluation of this part of the seminar, it was important to establish how much the six questions connected with the participants. Which ones were helpful and interesting? Which questions were “flesh-and-blood” preachers wrestling with? Which ones in reality were “non-questions” for the people listening? To find the answer, the evaluation looked at the same issue but from opposite angles, first asking for the most helpful question, followed by the least helpful question.

When indicating which of the six key questions surrounding the use of objects was most helpful or interesting for them, some participants requested that they be able to select more than one. As a result, forty-one “votes” were distributed amongst the six questions. Although all six were selected at some point, the questions which connected most with the people were “Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?” (ten votes) and “Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?” (thirteen votes). In contrast, it appears the questions which were not particularly important to the listeners were “Are they appropriate for teaching adults?” (four votes) and “Is verbal communication alone the most effective method for a sermon?” (three votes).

The reverse question yielded results that predictably complemented those of the first question. The “trivialize” question was chosen as the least helpful or interesting just three times and the “words and images” question had only two votes. At the same time, the “verbal communication alone” question was selected by seven people to be the least helpful. There were also five participants who didn’t choose any question in this category, which seemed to indicate that they didn’t find any question either too difficult or unhelpful.

Based on the results of these two evaluative questions, it would seem that those attending the seminar were most interested in the issues centred around trivializing the message and using both words and images. Conversely, they were less concerned about whether only verbal communication should be used in a sermon and if objects were appropriate for adults. Those questions seemed to be less important or perhaps already settled in their minds compared to the others.

The last major section of the presentation moved the focus from discussing *why* physical objects should be used to the issue of *how* they should be used. It was centred on the practical questions of when objects could be used in a sermon, what objects are the best choices for the preacher, and how those objects should be used in a sermon.

Therefore the evaluation asked the participants if those guidelines were helpful or not.

In describing the usefulness of the information about choosing and using an object, most of those attending (seventeen) indicated that the guidelines would make it easier for them to use objects in the future when they preached. Some of the other people were still wrestling with what had been presented. Six people liked what they heard but still couldn’t picture themselves using objects in their sermons. Two others felt they

simply needed more time to process all that they had heard. Interestingly, it was clear from their answers to other questions that, even though they were still thinking about it, they both expected that, in the future, they would occasionally use objects when they preach. Finally, two attendees believed that the information about choosing and using objects was not helpful to them personally. However, neither were opposed to their use. Based on their other answers as well as extra comments written in the evaluation, they both supported using physical objects in sermons but perhaps simply didn't hear anything new in the section on how to use those objects.

Why is it that so many preachers don't use physical objects when they preach? This was one of the subjects covered in this final section of the presentation. The most common reason among the participants for not using objects was the issue of habit (selected by eleven people). It simply wasn't something they typically did. However, many other reasons were also indicated. For some it was tradition within the church or personal time constraints. Others felt that they lacked resources or had trouble finding the right object. There were even two people who admitted that, for them, the reason was probably indifference, feeling that their sermons were good enough without them. What seemed clear from the responses, though, was that there are many challenging forces for preachers to overcome in order to include effective objects in their communication of God's Word.

The last few questions on the evaluation form pertained to the overall presentation. Everyone who attended the seminar felt that the presenter was knowledgeable of the subject and most people (twenty-one) stated that they had no problems understanding what they heard. Another four attendees felt that they

understood most of what was presented. Unfortunately, there were two people who claimed that they could only somewhat understand. Although the reason wasn't given, there is a possibility that the struggles were language-related given the varying levels of English competency among the participants and the fact that the great majority of people did not have difficulty following what was presented.

There were a few things in the presentation with which some of the participants disagreed. Some of the issues were related to content while the others were more focused on presentation. A couple of people disagreed with the assertion that objects should not be passed around during the sermon. They felt that the risk of distraction was worth taking due to the benefit of people personally touching the item. Perhaps there are some exceptions to the "do not pass the object around" principle. Yet people who have stood up front teaching while an object was circulating the room know the great potential for distraction found in such a practice.

One person felt that there are some sermon subjects which are not fitting for physical objects, such as heaven, hell, God, etc. However one could respond that it is possible to represent an abstract idea, even if only partially, through a physical object. For example, the very difficult concept of the Trinity can be captured in a simple shamrock. Even in the Bible, "streets of gold" and "gates made of pearl" are physical ways of portraying the incomprehensible nature of heaven. It should be acknowledged, though, that there are some subjects which are inherently more difficult to pair up with a physical object. In those cases, the preacher will need to be prepared to work harder, think longer and dig deeper to find the right objects to use.

It was felt by another person that it was not helpful to talk about Jesus' miracles since he could use them in a way which today's preachers can't. It would appear that this attendee seemed to have misunderstood the point that the use of miracles was one of the ways by which Jesus added visual elements to his teaching. The intent was not that we must do likewise with miracles.

There was one participant who had a couple of suggestions regarding the presentation itself. She felt that it would have been better if more visuals could have been used during the early part of the presentation. There is truth to what she said. It would have been an improvement if the first section which focused on the Bible could have included some objects, similar to what happened in the other sections. However, an object which was helpful and not forced could not be found for that part of the seminar. To use a poorly fitting object in this presentation would have been extremely counterproductive.

The same person also recommended that more time should have been dedicated to the practical use of physical objects. The way in which the time in the seminar was divided was certainly not an easy decision. It was important that a significant portion be dedicated to practical issues. However, since the custom of using physical objects is so foreign to most homiletical teaching and practice, it was felt that it was crucial to establish its credibility and importance before teaching could proceed to the other issues of when, what and how. A longer presentation time would have allowed for an extended focus on practical use, but then there would have been an increased challenge in maintaining the attention of the listeners.

Since the goal of the seminar was to increase the practice of using objects among the preachers who participated in the seminar, it was particularly important to ask them about their future expectations in this area. After hearing the presentation, of the twenty-five people who answered this question, they all believed that in the future they would use visuals in their sermons either regularly (fourteen people) or occasionally (eleven). This provided an interesting contrast with the way that they had described their current practice earlier in the evaluation. Before coming to the seminar, four used objects regularly, eleven used them occasionally, four included them only rarely and eight of the participants didn't make use of them at all. If the first step toward altering behaviour is to affect the attitude, it seems like the presentation had some positive impact.

The evaluation ended with a question which asked the participants to share the one idea which was most important for them in their ministry. Their answers were quite diverse, although many of them (ten people) felt that the basic concept of using both words and images in their sermons was the one which they were most likely to "take home" with them. In some ways, the simplicity of this somewhat common response demonstrates once more how narrow the perception of preaching is for so many people. While a multisensory approach has been studied and practiced a great deal by those in the field of teaching, it has been very slow to penetrate into homiletical circles.

The other responses to this final question were all more specific, zeroing in on particular aspects that were presented. The next most common response (five people) was the idea that physical objects help more people understand and reach people with different learning styles more effectively. A couple of others were impacted by the way that physical objects aid in the memory process of the listeners. There were two people

who found that the guidelines for choosing the right objects were important to them.

Two others felt that the clear connection between object and the idea being communicated was the truth they were going to take home with them.

All of the other answers were given by single individuals. Their responses about what was important to them personally included the tension between contextualizing and compromising, making abstract ideas concrete, the necessity of practicing, and choosing fresh objects over predictable ones. It was interesting how wide-ranging the points of interest were, showing in yet another way the differences between people when it comes to learning.

My personal evaluation of the Preachers' Seminar was based not only on the evaluation forms turned in, but also on several conversations which took place during the tea break and after the presentation as well as the many unsolicited comments received over the course of the week which followed. There were a couple of people who found the experience to be only mildly or moderately helpful. However, for most of the people who attended, it seemed to be a topic that was both enjoyable and challenging for them. Will it change the way they preach? It will certainly be interesting to observe them over the coming months and years to see if their preaching includes physical objects. A couple of them have already reported how they have tried to use the ideas which were shared at the seminar.

One way in which the presentation could be improved would be to find an object or two which could be used in an effective way during the first section on the biblical evidence. This would be particularly helpful if it demonstrated a different approach to using objects compared to those which have already been included in the seminar. It



might also be beneficial if a more careful explanation was given surrounding those points which proved confusing to a couple of the participants, such as Jesus' use of miracles as a visual tool. However, by and large, the seminar seemed to be effective in regard to the content covered, the pace at which it was presented, the visuals which were included, and the overall atmosphere.

Since there has not been much research done in this particular area of homiletics, future endeavours could explore a number of different elements. One area which seemed to be lacking in this thesis-project, was the perspective of the listener in the pew. It would likely be beneficial to gather data from lay people who are exposed to sermons employing objects in order to analyze the effect they have on the listeners. Personally, there is also an interest to explore further the impact of physical objects in sermons across cultural lines, particularly to see if there is any difference between "developed" and "developing" nations. For those who are interested in continuing research into this aspect of preaching, there are some other potentially valuable directions worth investigating. A great deal has been written about multisensory learning in the field of education, especially when compared to homiletics. Perhaps there are some additional features of teaching that includes visuals which would be applicable and helpful to preaching. It may also be profitable to examine reliable data regarding the effect on the brain of learning through both sight and hearing.

In reflecting back on the whole process, from the research, through the writing, and finally concluding with the seminar, it has been an enjoyable and challenging experience. It has been personally confirming as well, since preaching with physical objects has been my preferred style of preaching for many years. Experientially, the

benefits of this approach have been clearly observed. However, now it has also been substantiated by research and study. The hope is that this thesis can be a benefit to the preaching community in its ongoing effort to communicate as clearly and effectively as possible. It is a monumental responsibility that demands the very best from those who have been called to proclaim the truth of God's Word.

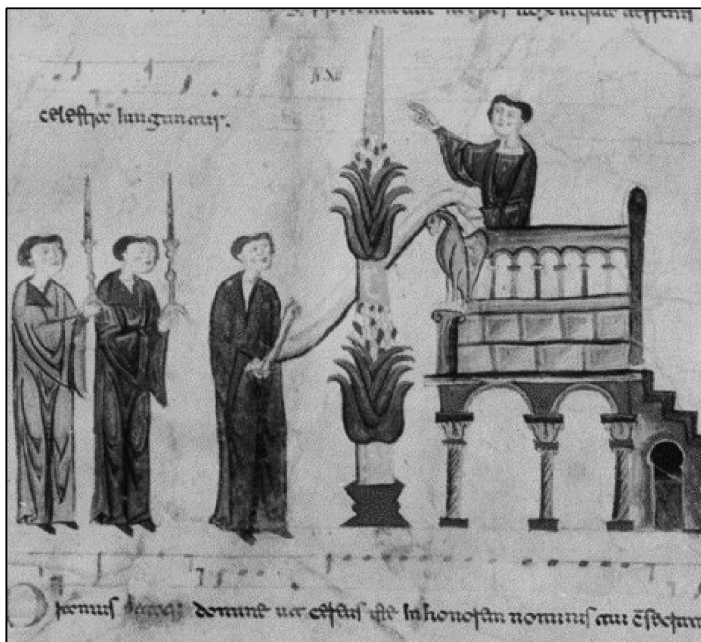
## APPENDIX 1

## EXULTET ROLLS

A portion of the  
Exultet of Bari,  
prepared in the  
eleventh century.<sup>1</sup>



An illustration of an  
Exultet roll being used  
in worship from roll  
Troy III, prepared in  
the twelfth and  
thirteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Margaret Duffy, "Exult! – The Easter Proclamation," *Ad Imaginem Dei*, 2013, accessed December 29, 2016, <http://imagineidei.blogspot.com/2013/03/exult-easter-proclamation.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Gian Pietro Basello, "Settimana Santa attraverso la liturgia," 2007, at the bottom of the section "DOMENICA DI PASQUA," accessed Dec 29, 2016, <http://www.elamit.net/bibbia/santaproject.htm>.

## APPENDIX 2

### TWENTY EXAMPLES OF OBJECTS TO USE IN A SERMON

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Cell phone, fire extinguisher, and map	1 Peter 1:3-7	We can always have hope because of God's presence (phone), God's protection (fire extinguisher), and God's purposes (map).
2	Scissors	Mark 12:28-34	Scissors need two blades working together in order to fulfill their purpose. In the same way, the only way for us to fulfill God's great mission is to have hearts completely devoted both to God and to others.
3	Large piece of bristol board which has been richly coloured as well as well-creased in the center (vertically).	Matt 27:50-51 (cf. Ex 26:30-33; Lev 16:1-2, 15-17; Heb 9:1-3, 6-7; Heb 10:19-25)	The "curtain" (bristol board) in front of the Holy of Holies was showed how our sin kept us separated from God. But Jesus' death and resurrection (tear curtain) opens the way for us to live in the very presence of God.
4	Bouncy rubber ball	Luke 18:9-14	What goes up must come down (toss ball in air) - God will humble the proud. What goes down will come up (bounce ball on the floor) - God will raise up the humble.
5	Magazine	Luke 2:8-20	The world tells us that we are valued when we have perfect hair, skin, teeth and weight. (Ads in magazine) But Christmas tells us that God values us enough to send his Son to earth.
6	Lump of Play-Doh	Mark 15:33-47	Christ's work on the cross divided one relationship - the Son and the Father (lump split into two). But it also united another relationship - ours and God's (two lumps made into one).

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Description</b>
7	A sneaker/running shoe, a dress shoe, a sandal	Rom 10:15	We can use our activities (sneaker), our worship (dress shoe), and our service (sandal) to bring the Good News to people.
8	Cardboard box with "Comfort Zone" on flap indicating the inside of the box and "Faith Zone" on the outside of the box.	Gen 12:1-9	Like Abraham, in order to obey the Lord, we need to leave our "Comfort Zone" and step into our "Faith Zone" where life has no limits, vast opportunities and unexpected blessings.
9	"Wanted" poster for criminal crucified with Jesus	Luke 23:23-25, 32-33, 39-43	This man was "wanted" by the Roman authorities because of his sin. But he was also "wanted" by God because of God's love for him.
10	Artificial flowers and real flowers	Eph 5:8-14	Living as children of the light requires integrity. The closer you get to artificial flowers, the more you can see they aren't genuine. The opposite is true with real flowers.
11	Scale with LOVE on one side and TRUTH on the other	2 John	In Scripture, we always find a balance being maintained between love and truth. Both are essential.
12	Tuning fork and a wooden board	Luke 8:16-18	The tuning fork is like the truth in the Bible. It is always the same, always true, always pure. We need to be like the board (place ringing tuning fork on board) which doesn't produce the sound, only amplifies it so others can hear.
13	The word "SALVATION" with two price tags - one says FREE and the other says EXPENSIVE	Luke 14:15-35	Our salvation is free, having nothing to do with our deeds or relationships (vv 15-24). But our salvation is expensive (vv. 25-35). It cost Jesus his life, and we need to be ready to give up everything to follow him.
14	Two bags apparently filled with a lot of money; one bag with two small coins	Mark 12:38-44	The bags of money can be used to help people visualize the contrast of the two types of offerings.

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Description</b>
15	Five good-size rocks, each with one word: Status, Knowledge, Credibility, Ability, Will	Ex. 3:1-4:17	Moses faced many stumbling blocks that were keeping him from obeying what God called him to do: the Rock of Status (3:11), Knowledge (3:13), Credibility (4:1), Ability (4:10), and Will (4:13).
16	A hammer, a heart, a nail	Ex 35:29-36:7	God's job is to give us the spiritual abilities (hammer). Our job is to give him our willingness to be used (heart). If you have the ability but no heart, it's like having a hammer but not using it to hit the nail. If you have the heart but not the ability, it's like trying to drive the nail in with just your hand.
17	A magnifying glass and a stethoscope	1 Sam 16:1-13	While we tend to judge people from the outside (magnifying glass) God looks at the heart (stethoscope).
18	Name tag	John 10:1-15	With God, we never need a name tag. He already knows us intimately.
19	Lasso	Rom 8:35-39	God's love is like a lasso. You only lasso something that you want near you. And the more the object at the other end tries to pull away, the harder the lasso hangs on.
20	A pillow with a Stop sign and a No U-turn sign also inside the case	Ex 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15	A theology of rest: God gave us Sundays because he knows us; he knows we sometimes need to stop (stop sign). And God gave us Sundays because he loves us; we don't need to go back to the old life of slavery (no u-turn).

**APPENDIX 3****ANALYSIS OF SERMONS: QUESTIONS AND RESULTS**Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Sermon: \_\_\_\_\_ Date preached: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Physical Object(s) used:

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?
2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?
3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?
4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?
5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?
7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?
8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?
9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?



## Interpretation of the Results from Analysis of Sermons

### Preachers

Five preachers were a part of this analysis. Three of the preachers are widely known to varying degrees. (Two are authors of books which were researched for this thesis.) The other two are local “regular” preachers from eastern Canada.

### Sermons

Four sermons from each preacher were analyzed, for a total of twenty sermons.

### Physical Objects Used

There was a wide diversity in the objects used by these preachers. They demonstrated incredible creativity as well as the variety of objects available that can be used in sermons. Since some sermons made use of multiple items, a total of twenty-six objects were used.

### Question 1

- 9/26 used the object at the beginning of the sermon (basically  $\frac{1}{3}$  or 35%).
- Only 2/26 closed the sermon with the object (8%).
- There was considerable variety as to when the object was used during the sermon, but usually each preacher showed tendencies or patterns:
  - Andy S. – all 5 in first half (4 of them from the beginning)
  - David S. – all 4 in the first half of the sermon
  - Francis C. – all 6 in the second half of the sermon
  - Gordon M. – all 5 objects were used in the second half of the sermon
  - Rick B. – all 6 in the first half of the sermon

### Question 2

- 9/26 objects were tied in to the whole sermon (35%).
- Once again, there were tendencies which could be noticed with the preachers:
  - Gordon M. and Francis C. – They consistently used objects for single illustrations.
  - David S. and Andy S. – Usually used objects which were tied into the whole sermon.
  - Rick B. – He was the only one to use a variety of approaches in this area.

### Question 3

- Only 2/26 objects had serious enough visibility issues to detract from the illustration (8%)

### Question 4

- To assess the purpose of the objects, two points were assigned to a primary purpose and one point was assigned to a secondary purpose.
- A total of 63 points were awarded. Here is the breakdown of points:
  - Help Understand = 34 pts (54%)
  - Capture Attention = 11 pts (17%)

- Make Memorable = 14 pts (22%)
- Prove a Truth = 4 pts (6%)
- The analysis of these sermons indicates the following observations regarding the purpose of the physical objects which were used:
  - “Help Understand” was clearly the most common purpose.
  - “Capture Attention” and “Make Memorable” were periodically the goals.
  - “Prove a Truth” was quite rare as a purpose for using an object.

#### Question 5

- Only once was the smoothness of delivery an issue in these sermons (4%). Usually it wasn't a problem at all.

#### Question 6

- Only once was the object too strong, to the extent that it detracted from the illustration.

#### Question 7

- On nine occasions (35%) the physical object was used to introduce an idea.
- Seventeen times (65%), the preacher began to discuss a concept and then unveiled an object to help
- All five preachers used both approaches. But clearly the more typical method was to use an object to support an idea which had already been introduced.

#### Question 8

- All the objects used were either familiar to the audience or clearly explained.

#### Question 9

- Each use of a physical object was assigned a mark out of four. In addition to the presentation, this mark was based on the following questions:
  - Did it adequately serve the point it was supposed to be supporting?
  - Did its presence have an impact or did it come out of nowhere and then disappear leaving one thinking, “What did that actually accomplish?”
  - Did it help strengthen the Big Idea of the sermon?
- These were the results:
  - 1 (4%) received a mark of 1, meaning it was not effective.
  - 3 (12%) received a mark of 2, meaning they were moderately effective.
  - 11 (42%) received a mark of 3, meaning they were quite effective.
  - 11 (42%) received a mark of 4, meaning they were very effective.
- This meant that 84% of the objects used were either quite effective or very effective.

Summary of Analyses of Andy Stanley's Sermons

	Sermon A		Sermon B	
<b>Object</b>	Giant letter "I"	"Desire" & "Expectation" wooden boxes with items inside	Giant letter "I"	Rope as "spouse leash"
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Present	Present	Present	Revealed [½]
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Whole	Whole	Whole	Single
<b>Visibility</b>	Visible	Visible	Visible	Visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Memory	1) Understand	1) Memory	1) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Obj > Idea	Obj > Idea	Obj > Idea	Obj > Idea
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar
<b>Effectiveness</b>	3/4	4/4	3/4	4/4

	<b>Sermon C</b>	<b>Sermon D</b>
<b>Object</b>	2 mugs (with faces) filled with pink & blue beads	2 pitchers with yellow & blue water
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Present	Present
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Whole	Whole
<b>Visibility</b>	Mostly visible	Visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Understand 2) Attention	1) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Obj > Idea	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar
<b>Effectiveness</b>	4/4	3/4

Analyses of Andy Stanley's Sermons

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Andy Stanley

Sermon: "Keeping my 'I' on You" (iMarriage 1) [A] Date preached: -----

Source: online – www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-Z-WeQkYKk (accessed Oct 7/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***"Desire" box***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Present from the beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Used for the whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Introduced the topic of marriage expectations (obj > idea)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Easy to understand***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Andy Stanley

Sermon: “Putting Your ‘I’ Out” (iMessage 2) [B] Date preached: -----

Source: online – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCPf33QAx2k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCPf33QAx2k) (accessed Oct 7/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***A) Giant letter “I”***

***B) Rope as a leash***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***A) Visible from the beginning***

***B) Revealed ½ through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***A) Connected to the whole sermon***

***B) Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***A) Visible***

***B) Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***A) Made Memorable***

***B) Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***A) Smooth***

***B) Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

*A) No*

*B) No*

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

*A) Introduced the idea (obj > idea)*

*B) Introduce theme of trying to control your spouse (obj > idea)*

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

*A) Familiar*

*B) Familiar*

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

*A) 3/4*

*B) 4/4*



## Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Andy Stanley

Sermon: “Feeling It” (Staying in Love 3) [C] Date preached: May 17/09

Source: online – northpoint.org/messages/staying-in-love/feeling-it/ (accessed Oct 7/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***2 mugs with faces, filled with pink and blue beads***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Present from the beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Connected to the whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible (with the help of the screen)***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Help Understand***

***2. Make Memorable***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Introduced issue that “stuff” comes out of us when we are “knocked” (obj > idea)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Easy to understand***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Andy Stanley

Sermon: “When Gracie Met Truthie” [D] Date preached: Apr 15/12

Source: online – northpoint.org/messages/when-gracie-met-truthie (accessed Oct 7/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***2 pitchers with names, filled with coloured water; large glass container between***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Present from the beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Connected to the whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Helped make clear the tension lived out by Jesus of grace & truth (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***3/4***

Summary of Analyses of David Steeves' Sermons

	<b>Sermon A</b>	<b>Sermon B</b>	<b>Sermon C</b>	<b>Sermon D</b>
<b>Object</b>	Box of grocery items	Tearing pages out of Bible	2 goldfish in fishbowl	Referee shirt
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Beginning	Revealed [ $\frac{1}{3}$ ]	Beginning	Revealed [ $\frac{1}{3}$ ]
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Single	Single	Whole	Single
<b>Visibility</b>	Moderately visible	Visible	Fairly visible	Easily visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Proof 2) Attention	1) Understand 2) Attention	1) Understand	1) Attention 2) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	Yes, for some	No	Maybe (with lights & music)
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj	Obj > Idea	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar
<b>Effectiveness</b>	4/4	2/4	3/4	4/4

Analyses of David Steeves' Sermons

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: David Steeves

Sermon: "Simplify 2" [A] Date preached: Mar 9/14

Source: online – <https://vimeo.com/88915815> (accessed Oct 22/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***Box of groceries***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed at the beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Main concept for whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Prove a Truth***

***2. Capture Attention***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

*Used to prove the busyness of people (idea > obj)*

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

*Familiar*

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

*4/4*

### Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: David Steeves

Sermon: “Rich Man and Lazarus” [B] Date preached: Aug 17/14

Source: online – <https://vimeo.com/103759663> (accessed Oct 22/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

#### ***Pages of a Bible***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

#### ***Revealed 1/3 through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

#### ***Single (though referred to later)***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

#### ***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

#### ***1. Help Understand***

#### ***2. Capture Attention***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

#### ***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***Yes, to the extent that some people would have been distracted from what he said next.***



7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Demonstrated how some people practice “cafeteria Christianity” (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***2/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: David Steeves

Sermon: “The End of Time” [C] Date preached: May 3/15

Source: online – <https://vimeo.com/126735854> (accessed Oct 22/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***2 goldfish in a fish bowl***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed at the beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Fairly visible with the help of the screen***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Introduced idea that your are made for much more, life beyond the glass (obj > idea)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***3/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: David Steeves

Sermon: “God’s Messengers” [D] Date preached: Dec 14/15

Source: online – <https://vimeo.com/114510969> (accessed Oct 22/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***Referee shirt***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed 1/3 through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Main concept for whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Capture Attention***

***2. Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***Perhaps for a small number, but most would have had no problem***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Emphasized the confrontation that had already been discussed (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

Summary of Analyses of Francis Chan's Sermons

	<b>Sermon A</b>	<b>Sermon B</b>	<b>Sermon C</b>
<b>Object</b>	Long rope with red end	Lemonade and frappuccino	Mrs. Potato Head
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Revealed [ $\frac{2}{3}$ ]	Revealed [ $\frac{2}{3}$ ]	Revealed [end]
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Single, but used for rest	Single	Single
<b>Visibility</b>	Visible	Visible	Ear hard to see; whole toy moderately visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Understand	1) Understand 2) Proof	1) Memory 2) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Medium smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar
<b>Effectiveness</b>	4/4	4/4	3/4

	<b>Sermon D</b>		
<b>Object</b>	Wallet	Fishing Rod with gummy worm & money	Chinese hat with items hanging
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Revealed [ $\frac{1}{2}$ ]	Revealed [ $\frac{2}{3}$ ]	Revealed [ $\frac{2}{3}$ ]
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Single	Single	Single
<b>Visibility</b>	Moderately visible	Visible	Visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Memory 2) Proof	1) Understand 2) Attention	1) Memory 2) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Medium smooth	Smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Obj > Idea	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar	Familiar
<b>Effectiveness</b>	3/4	3/4	4/4

Analyses of Francis Chan's Sermons

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Francis Chan

Sermon: "Living Eternally" [A] Date preached: Mar 8/09

Source: online – www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8f8lwy6EBk (accessed Oct 15/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***Rope with a red end***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed 2/3 through sermon, but left out for remainder***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single, but used for the rest of the sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***



7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***It was used to clarify a concept (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Francis Chan

Sermon: “How to Hear from God” [B] Date preached: Nov 4/14

Source: online – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBV6VqcuLY8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBV6VqcuLY8) (accessed Oct 15/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***2 glasses – one with lemonade and one a frappuccino***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed  $\frac{2}{3}$  through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Help Understand***

***2. Prove a Truth***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Fairly smoothly (a small table would have helped)***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Used to clarify a point (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Francis Chan

Sermon: “A New Attitude Towards People” [C] Date preached: Mar 15/15

Source: online – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfMnPrqSiFE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfMnPrqSiFE) (accessed Oct 15/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***Mrs. Potato Head toy***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed near the end of the sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Mrs. Potato Head was fairly visible, but her ear was hard to see***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Made Memorable***

***2. Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***It helped to demonstrate all of us being part of Christ's body (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***3/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Francis Chan

Sermon: “When Sin Looks More Enjoyable Than God” [D] Date preached: Apr 25/15

Source: online – www.youtube.com/watch?v=iszVTWUGQQM (accessed Oct 16/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

- A) Wallet*
- B) Fishing rod*
- C) Chinese hat with hanging items*

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

- A) Revealed ½ through sermon*
- B) Revealed ⅔ through sermon*
- C) Revealed ⅔ through sermon (immediately following the fishing rod)*

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

- A) Single*
- B) Single*
- C) Single*

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

- A) Fairly visible*
- B) Visible*
- C) Visible*

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

- A) 1. Make Memorable*  
*2. Prove a Truth*
- B) 1. Help Understand*  
*2. Capture Attention*
- C) 1. Make Memorable*  
*2. Help Understand*

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***A) Fairly smooth***

***B) Smooth***

***C) Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***A) No***

***B) No***

***C) No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***A) Introduced an idea (obj > idea)***

***B) Clarified a concept about temptation (idea > obj)***

***C) Further clarified about temptation being everywhere we look (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***A) Familiar***

***B) Familiar***

***C) Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***A) 3/4***

***B) 3/4***

***C) 4/4***

Summary of Analyses of Gordon MacLeod's Sermons

	<b>Sermon A</b>	<b>Sermon B</b>	<b>Sermon C</b>		<b>Sermon D</b>
<b>Object</b>	Pitch fork & shovel	Cracked wall (duct tape, band aid, picture)	Plumb line	VIM bottle	Handcuffs
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Revealed [¾]	(covered) Revealed [⅔]	Revealed [⅔]	Revealed [end]	Revealed [½]
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
<b>Visibility</b>	Easily visible	Easily visible	Fairly visible	Fairly visible	Moderately visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Attention 2) Memory	1) Understand 2) Memory	1) Understand 2) Memory	1) Attention 2) Memory	1) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Medium smooth	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Obj > Idea	Obj > Idea	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar	Explained well	Familiar	Familiar
<b>Effectiveness</b>	2/4	4/4	3/4	1/4	3/4



Analyses of Gordon MacLeod's Sermons

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Gordon MacLeod

Sermon: "Sow What" [A] Date preached: Sept 27/15

Source: online – <https://vimeo.com/140602864> (accessed Oct 21/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***pitch fork and shovel***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed  $\frac{3}{4}$  through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Capture Attention***

***2. Make Memorable***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

*No*

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

*Introduced idea that Kingdom work can be hard but necessary (obj > idea)*

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

*Familiar*

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

*2/4*

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Gordon MacLeod

Sermon: “Renovation of the Heart” (Boot Camp #1) [B] Date preached: July 5/15

Source: Attained directly from Lewisville Baptist Church, Moncton, NB, Canada

Physical Object(s) used:

***Large section of wall with large crack running through it. In illustration duct tape, a band-aid and a hanging picture were also used.***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Covered until  $\frac{2}{3}$  through the sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Easily visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Help Understand***

***2. Make Memorable***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Mostly smoothly with a little bit of hesitancy***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Introduced idea that the problem is in the foundation (obj > idea)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Gordon MacLeod

Sermon: “Plumb Line” (Boot Camp #3) [C] Date preached: July 19/15

Source: Attained directly from Lewisville Baptist Church, Moncton, NB, Canada

Physical Object(s) used:

***A) Piece of string as a plumb line (supplemented with a level)***

***B) VIM bottle***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***A) Revealed  $\frac{2}{3}$  through sermon***

***B) Revealed near the end of the sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***A) Single***

***B) Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***A) Fairly visible***

***B) Fairly visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***A) 1. Help Understand***

***2. Make Memorable***

***B) 1. Capture Attention***

***2. Make Memorable***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***A) Smoothly***

***B) Smoothly***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

*A) No*

*B) No*

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

*A) Helped people visualize that God's Word helps us measure what we hear (idea > obj)*

*B) Reinforced how we bring change in our lives (idea > obj)*

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

*A) Clear explanation was given*

*B) Familiar*

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

*A) 3/4*

*B) 1/4*

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Gordon MacLeod

Sermon: “Submission” (Boot Camp #4) [D] Date preached: July 26/15

Source: Attained directly from Lewisville Baptist Church, Moncton, NB, Canada

Physical Object(s) used:

***Handcuffs***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed ½ through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Fairly visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smoothly***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

*Used to make concrete the concept of entanglements (idea > obj)*

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

*Familiar*

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

*3/4*



Summary of Analyses of Rick Blackwood's Sermons

	<b>Sermon A</b>		
<b>Object</b>	A dash ("–") made from cardboard	Stationary bike	Pages on floor as 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> bases
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Beginning	Present; focus on @ ¼	Revealed [½]
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Whole	Single	Single
<b>Visibility</b>	Somewhat small, but prob. visible on screen	Visible	On floor, but prob. visible on screen
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Memory	1) Understand	1) Understand
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Smooth	Medium smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Obj > Idea	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Explained well	Familiar	Explained well
<b>Effectiveness</b>	4/4	3/4	3/4

	<b>Sermon B</b>	<b>Sermon C</b>	<b>Sermon D</b>
<b>Object</b>	2 glasses, water, pitcher with red liquid	Globe	Sheep Pen
<b>Present from beginning or Revealed</b>	Present but not obvious	Revealed [ $\frac{1}{4}$ & $\frac{1}{2}$ ]	Present
<b>Single illustration or Whole sermon</b>	Single, but returned at conclusion	Single	Whole
<b>Visibility</b>	Mostly visible	Visible	Visible
<b>Understand, Attention, Proof or Memory</b>	1) Understand	1) Attention 2) Understand	1) Understand 2) Memory
<b>Delivery</b>	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth
<b>Too strong</b>	No	No	No
<b>Object &gt; Idea or Idea &gt; Object</b>	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj	Idea > Obj
<b>Familiar or Explained</b>	Familiar	Familiar	Explained well
<b>Effectiveness</b>	3/4	2/4	4/4

Analyses of Rick Blackwood's Sermons

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Rick Blackwood

Sermon: "When God Calls" [A] Date preached: Nov 2/13

Source: online – site.cfmiami.org/sermons/watch/when-god-calls (accessed Oct 20/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

- A) "Dash" (between dates)***
- B) Stationary bike***
- C) Pages of paper as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base in baseball***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

- A) Revealed at the beginning of sermon***
- B) Present from the beginning; focus on it was ¼ through sermon***
- C) Revealed ½ through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

- A) Connected to whole sermon***
- B) Single***
- C) Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

- A) Rather small and somewhat difficult to see***
- B) Visible***
- C) Difficult to see pages on the floor***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

- A) 1. Make Memorable***
- 2. Help Understand***
- B) 1. Help Understand***
- C) 1. Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***A) Smooth***

***B) Smooth***

***C) Room for improvement (pages at back of the stage)***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***A) No***

***B) No***

***C) No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***A) Introduced the idea of a meaningless vs. a meaningful life (obj > idea)***

***B) Clarified an idea already introduced (idea > obj)***

***C) Clarified an idea already being discussed (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***A) Mostly familiar; clear explanation was given***

***B) Familiar***

***C) Concise, clear explanation was given***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***A) 4/4***

***B) 3/4***

***C) 3/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Rick Blackwood

Sermon: “A Clear and Present Danger” [B] Date preached: Feb 9/14

Source: online – site.cfmiami.org/sermons/watch/a-clear-and-present-danger (accessed Oct 20/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***2 glasses filled with water; pitcher filled with red liquid***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Present from the beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single, but referred to again at the end of the sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Fairly visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Concept about lust was discussed then demonstrated with the glasses (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***3/4***

Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Rick Blackwood

Sermon: “The Aftermath” [C] Date preached: Oct 13/13

Source: online – site.cfmiami.org/sermons/watch/the-aftermath (accessed Oct 20/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***Globe***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Revealed ¼ through sermon***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Single***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Capture Attention***

***2. Help Understand***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***It was used to clarify what was already being discussed (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***2/4***



Evaluation Form for Preachers Using Physical Objects

Preacher: Rick Blackwood

Sermon: “Protection” [D] Date preached: Oct 12/15

Source: online – site.cfmiami.org/sermons/watch/protection (accessed Oct 20/15)

Physical Object(s) used:

***Sheep pen***

1. Was the object present from the beginning of the sermon, or was it revealed while the sermon was in process?

***Present from beginning***

2. Was the object used as a single illustration or was it connected to the sermon as a whole?

***Connected to whole sermon***

3. Was the object easily visible to the congregation, either directly or projected onto a screen?

***Visible***

4. Was the object used primarily to help make a complex or abstract idea more easily understandable? Or did it help prove something to be true? Or was the goal to help the listeners remember the idea(s)? Or did it capture the attention of the listeners?

***1. Help Understand***

***2. Make Memorable***

5. Did its use happen smoothly or was it awkward/disjointed/needing more practice?

***Smooth***

6. Was the visual so strong or surprising that it actually took attention away from the point it was illustrating?

***No***

7. Was the object used to introduce an idea (object then idea) or rather to prove/clarify an idea that had already been presented (idea then object)?

***Demonstrated the protection God has for us (idea > obj)***

8. Was the object one which would be familiar to the listeners? If not, was it explained simply and clearly while still maintaining its effectiveness as an illustration?

***Mostly familiar***

9. How effective was the use of the object as a visual element of the sermon?

***4/4***

## APPENDIX 4

### INVITATION TO THE SEMINAR (THE PROJECT)



You're Invited to a

*Preachers' Seminar:*  
*What You See Is What You Get*

December 10, 2016  
by Rev. Darrell Bustin

In Completion of his Doctorate of Ministry studies



As preachers, our sermons form one of the most important and high-impact aspects of our ministries. And yet how often do we have the opportunity to get together in order to sharpen our skills and develop our craft? On **Saturday, Dec. 10, 2016** from **9 am - 12** you are welcome to join with others for a Preachers' Seminar focused on the use of physical objects in sermons. It will take place at the office of the Association des Eglises Baptistes au Rwanda (AEBR) in Kacyiru. [See map on reverse]

For the sake of planning, please let Darrell know you are coming by **Wednesday, Dec. 7.**

Phone: 0787-091-108

Email: cbmbustins@gmail.com

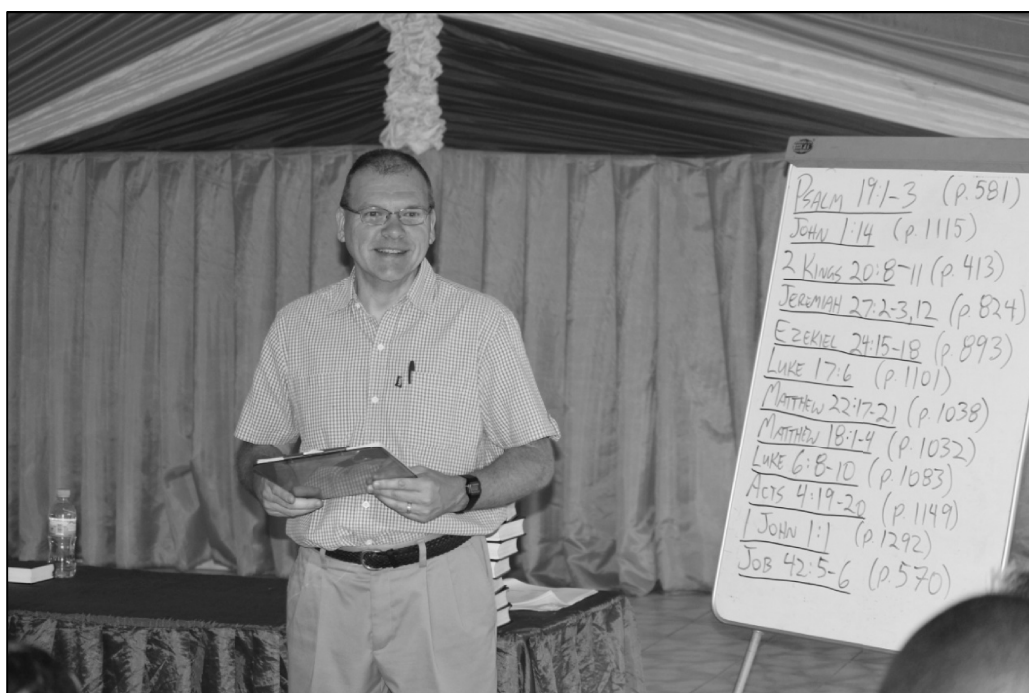
Hope to see you there!

Note: This seminar will require a working knowledge of English. Translation will **not** be provided.

## APPENDIX 5

### PICTURES FROM THE PREACHERS' SEMINAR

Kigali, Rwanda  
December 10, 2016





Some of the participants attending the Preachers' Seminar



Demonstrating the homemade Exultet Roll

## APPENDIX 6

### RESULTS OF PRESENTATION EVALUATION BY PARTICIPANTS

#### **Personal Information**

1. Gender: [19] Male [9] Female
2. Age: [8] 20-29  
[3] 30-39  
[9] 40-49  
[7] 50-59  
[0] 60+
3. Nationality: [21] Rwandan  
[0] African from a country besides Rwanda  
[5] Canadian  
[0] American  
[2] From a country in Europe
4. Current preaching activity: [3] I usually preach at least once per week  
[7] I usually preach a couple of times each month  
[0] I usually preach about once per month  
[17] I preach a few times each year  
[1] I rarely or never preach
5. Do you believe that preaching is one of your spiritual gifts? [22] Yes  
[3] No  
[3] Not sure
6. If you regularly or occasionally preach, do you use physical objects in your sermons?  
[4] Yes, regularly  
[11] Yes, occasionally  
[4] Yes, but only rarely  
[8] No

#### **Section 1: Looking into the Bible**

7. How would you describe the part of the presentation on biblical evidence?  
[21] Informative and thorough  
[2] Difficult to understand  
[4] Good, but it didn't cover all the issues  
[0] Not helpful

8. Did you hear anything about the use of visuals in the Bible which was new for you?

[8] No

[21] Yes. Please describe what was new for you:

[4] Real-Life Sermon Method by OT prophets

[1] Dramatization Method by OT prophets

[2] Seeing familiar verses from a new perspective

[1] God using visuals in the OT

    ↪ [1] Especially in giving instructions

[1] Jesus using visuals in the NT

    ↪ [1] Especially using nature as visuals

[1] How much visuals were used throughout the Bible

[1] Everything

Note: Several people misunderstood and answered regarding presentation as a whole.

[1] Physical objects elevate preaching

    ↪ [2] Especially the Big Three benefits

[2] Guidelines for using objects

    ↪ [1] Especially not passing them around

[2] Exultet rolls from the Middle Ages

## **Section 2: Why Physical Objects Should Be Used**

9. Which of the six key questions surrounding the use of objects in sermons was the most helpful or interesting for you?

[6] Are they appropriate for Christian teaching?

[4] Are they appropriate for teaching adults?

[10] Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?

[3] Is verbal communication alone the most effective method for a sermon?

[13] Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?

[5] Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

10. Which of the six questions was most difficult to understand or the least helpful to you?

[5] Are they appropriate for Christian teaching?

[5] Are they appropriate for teaching adults?

[3] Do they trivialize the message or deepen it?

[7] Is verbal communication alone the most effective method for a sermon?

[2] Is it best for a sermon to use both words and images?

[4] Why do preachers not use physical objects in their sermons?

[5] None of the above

### **Section 3: How Physical Objects Should Be Used**

11. Please describe how useful the information on choosing and using objects was for you.
- [2] I do not think it was helpful for me.
  - [6] Even though it was interesting, I have a hard time picturing me using objects when I preach.
  - [2] I'm not sure yet. I may need more time to think about it.
  - [17] The steps and guidelines will make it easier for me to try using visuals.
12. If you do not use physical objects when you preach, which of these reasons best describes why?
- [2] Indifference - "My sermons are good enough without them."
  - [5] Tradition - "That's just not done in our church."
  - [0] Style - "That's not my style."
  - [11] Habit - "I've never done that before."
  - [4] Time - "Who has time for that?"
  - [3] Other:  [1] "Can't find a good object"; [1] "I need further resources"
  - [6] Not applicable. I use physical objects when I preach.
  - [1] Not applicable. I never/almost never preach.

### **The Overall Presentation**

13. Did the presenter seem to be knowledgeable of the subject?
- [27] Yes
  - [0] Mostly
  - [0] Only somewhat
  - [0] No
14. Were you able to understand what was being presented?
- [21] Yes
  - [4] Mostly
  - [2] Only somewhat
  - [0] No
15. Was there anything in the presentation that you disagreed with?
- [2] Passing objects can work
  - [1] Some sermon subjects don't lend themselves to using objects
  - [1] Jesus used miracles in a way which we can't
  - [1] The early part of the presentation needed visuals
  - [1] It would have been better if more time had been spent on the practical use



16. If you regularly or occasionally preach, do you expect that you will use physical objects in your sermons in the future?
- [16] Yes, regularly
  - [11] Yes, occasionally
  - [0] Yes, but only rarely
  - [0] No
17. From everything that you have heard in the presentation, what is the one idea that will be most helpful to you in your ministry, which you want to take home with you?
- [10] Using both words and images in my sermons
  - [5] Using physical objects helps more people understand and reaches people with different learning styles
  - [2] Using objects helps people remember
  - [2] Guidelines for choosing objects
  - [2] The importance of the clear connection between object and truth being communicated
  - [1] The tension between contextualizing and compromising
  - [1] Using objects helps make abstract ideas concrete
  - [1] The importance of choosing fresh objects over predictable ones
  - [1] The importance of practicing with the object beforehand
  - [1] Objects can be found in nature, people, and all over
  - [1] Visuals can be used in many different ways in a sermon
  - [1] Guidelines for using objects
  - [1] The way that using objects in sermons takes careful thought

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## VITA

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